LECTURES ON THE GOSPELS

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SHORT LECTURES

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THE SUNDAY GOSPELS

FROM ADVENT TO EASTER.

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THE SUNDAY GOSPELS

FROM ADVENT TO EASTER.

BY THE

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INTRODUCTION.

WE may look upon the passages of Holy Scripture, which our Church has selected for the different Gospels during the year, as very choice portions of God's Word. They have therefore a special claim upon us, and are worthy of our closest attention.

It is supposed that these portions were chiefly selected by St. Jerome, more than a thousand years ago. And care has evidently been taken, in most cases, to suit the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel, to the particular day on which they are read.

When the Gospels are read in our Public Services, there are two ways in which we show our marked reverence for

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them. First, by expressing our thankfulness, and exclaiming, as with one united voice, 'Glory be to Thee, O God!' And secondly, by rising from our seats, and standing up during the reading of them. We thus show our special regard for these portions of the Bible, which so often contain the very words of our Lord Himself.

Besides the Sunday Gospels, I have introduced a few of those appointed for the leading Festivals, such as Christmas Day, the Epiphany, &c.

Whilst we examine these Gospels, may God vouchsafe to us the teaching of His Holy Spirit, so that 'the word of Christ may dwell in us richly: enlightening us, comforting us, and nourishing our souls.'*

* In preparing these Lectures on the Gospels, I have not scrupled to avail myself of all the aid I could obtain from various writers, adopting their very words when I felt it to be desirable.

Lectures on the Gospels.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

St. Matt. xxi. 1–13.

When they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell yet he daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them; and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the Prophet of

Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple; and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

To-DAY is the opening of the Church year. It begins with the blessed, but solemn, season of Advent; that season which is intended to remind us of our Lord's *first coming* 'in great humility,' and also of His *coming again* 'in His glorious majesty.'

The reason why the portion now before us has been chosen for the Gospel to-day is because it shows Christ to us, treated with more than customary honour; and so it leads us to think how He will be welcomed, when He appears at His second coming.

We here behold our Lord entering Jerusalem for the last time; and He enters it as a King, though He well knew that in a very few days the crown He would have to wear would be a crown of thorns, and that a mock sceptre would be put into His hands.

When He arrives at Bethphage, with His faithful disciples, He sends two of them

forward to prepare for His solemn entry. Contrary to His usual custom, He determines now to ride into the city; and bids them bring Him an ass for the purpose. 'Go into the next village (He says) and you will find one suited to my wants. And, if you have any difficulty, say, The Lord hath need of it.' Here He spoke as one having authority, claiming the animal as His right. The messengers presently return, bringing with them an ass and its foal. And then, using their own garments as a covering, they set Jesus thereon.

Our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, seated upon an *ass*, had nothing low or mean in it. The ass, the mule, and the camel, were at this time the animals usually ridden; horses being chiefly used for purposes of warfare. But persons of the highest rank, even kings and princes, rode on *asses* in times of peace. It is said of Jair, who was one of the judges of Israel, that he had thirty sons, that rode on thirty ass colts. And Solomon, when he was made king, rode in state upon a mule. The Prophet Zechariah had also foretold that our Lord would in this manner make His entry into

Jerusalem ; 'Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and *sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*'

You see then that our Saviour's meekness was shown, not by His choosing *an ass* to carry Him, but by His avoiding that pomp and parade which commonly attended the movements of a king. He went with all the dignity of a sovereign, and yet was entirely free from any of that pride and ambition, which were generally shown on such occasions.

It was indeed an act of unspeakable humility that He appeared on earth at all in our poor form. And never perhaps did the meek and lowly Jesus appear less proud, than when He rode that day into Jerusalem, amidst the shouts of the people.

And now, leaving Bethphage and the Mount of Olives behind Him, He arrives within sight of Jerusalem. The various buildings rise up before Him ; and of these the most striking was that gorgeous Temple, which had been built with so much care, but which was soon to be destroyed by the

Roman army. St. Luke tells us that the very sight of it on this occasion drew tears from the Saviour's eyes. 'When He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes!'

But another sight also attracts His attention. The news of His approach had spread far and wide; and He beholds a vast concourse of people, coming forth from the city to greet Him. Garments are spread along the path, branches are cut down, and the road is carpeted with these signs of their respect and joy. And as He rides along, hundreds of eager voices join in the shout, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'

On His arrival the streets swarm with people; some desiring to join the cavalcade, and others rushing out of their houses, with the eager inquiry, 'Who is this?' 'Is it a king that is coming?' 'Who is this stranger?' And when the

multitude answered, 'This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth;' some perhaps were disappointed, and some were filled with indignation. But I daresay most of them fell in with the crowd, and shouted with the rest, 'Hosannah to the Son of David!'

There was One however who was calm amidst this uproar, and in whose heart there was a feeling of sadness amidst the general rejoicing. The Saviour Himself knew well enough that the welcome He was now receiving was worth but little, for it came from hearts unstable as water. He knew that in less than a week some of these very persons would turn against Him, and side with His persecutors; and that He Himself would be led through those streets as a condemned malefactor.

On reaching the City, our Lord goes at once to His Father's house, the Temple. And it was either *then*, or rather, as St. Mark's account leads us to suppose, on a *second visit* which he paid it the next day, that His heart was bitterly pained by finding the sacred Building turned, to all appearance, into a place of merchandise.

His eye was attracted, not by devout worshippers, but by numbers of people buying and selling, by tables of money-changers on one side, and on the other stalls for the sale of doves and other animals. He exclaims, with grief and astonishment, 'It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.' And then with that peculiar authority which He sometimes displayed—that authority, which came with all the more power from one who was usually so meek and gentle—He proceeded to expel these traffickers, driving them forcibly out of His Father's house.

But how came the merchandise there? We must bear in mind that the Temple had many compartments; and that the buying and selling probably took place in the outer court, which was the least sacred part of the building. But how could it ever have been allowed even there? It is probable that at first nothing was sold but what was necessary for the sacrifices. But by degrees it extended also to other goods; and this must have given rise to much that was most unseemly in the House of God.

The money-changers too would be likely to drive a profitable trade; for as people came up to worship from all parts of Judæa, they were frequently obliged to change their money for what would pass current at Jerusalem.

But matters had now come to such a pass, that our Lord was filled with righteous indignation, and forthwith cleared the Temple of these intruders.

Putting together the two circumstances mentioned in this Gospel, we are especially struck by one thing; namely, the dignity and authority of the Saviour. For it is very remarkable that He who, as to His outward circumstances, was but a poor carpenter's son, who had no possessions, and no place even where to lay His head, who was on most occasions despised and rejected of men—that He should have had that about Him, which drew from the people such wonderful awe and respect as they now showed Him. As He rides into Jerusalem, there is something in His look, His manner, His whole bearing, which belonged to no other person. And this leads

the people to treat Him, for the moment, almost as their King.

Then see Him in the Temple, alone, unarmed, and unprotected. They might have insulted Him, they might have disputed His power, and laughed at His pretensions. But no; He speaks with authority, and they obey. There was a secret influence about Him which they could not resist. His look and His words paralysed them; and they slank away, conscience-stricken and confounded.

And *this* is the glorious Saviour, the heavenly King, whom we are called upon to serve. At His first coming He appeared 'riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.' But when He comes again, it will be 'in His glory,' 'riding upon the wings of the wind.' Eighteen hundred years ago, He came suddenly to His Temple, casting out from thence the profaners of that holy place. When He returns, He will come 'at a time when we look not for Him;' and He will cast out of His heavenly kingdom 'all things that offend, and all that work iniquity.'

May *we* be found among His true dis-

ciples in that day! And may we enter with Him into the 'many mansions' of His Father's house, where He is 'gone to prepare a place for us!'

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ST. LUKE, XXI. 25–33.

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable, Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled: heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.

THE whole of this chapter, from which the Gospel is taken, is a difficult one. Our Lord in it speaks of *two* things, *the Destruction of Jerusalem*, which was very near at hand; and also of *His own Second Coming*, which was yet distant. The

greater part of the chapter refers to the *first* of these; namely, the Destruction of Jerusalem. But every now and then there is a verse or two which clearly points to the other; namely, to the still more important and stirring event of Christ's Second Advent.

If you look back to the fifth and two following verses, you will see that, as Jesus was standing with some of His disciples near the Temple, they remarked upon the beauty of the building. Upon which He said, 'As for these things which ye behold, the days will come in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.' They then ask Him to give them further information concerning that event, saying, 'Master, when shall these things be? And what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?'

Our Lord upon this mentions certain sure signs, by which they might know when the time of Jerusalem's destruction drew near. He tells them that there would be false Christs, who would try to deceive them; that they would hear of

wars and commotions, nation rising against nation; that there would be earthquakes, and pestilences, and unusual things seen in the heavens; that there would be persecutions against His followers, even friends and relatives betraying one another. In short, there would come days of bitter trial, when vengeance would come down upon the unbelieving, whilst the faithful would be kept in peace and safety.

And now we come to the twenty-fifth verse, where our Gospel for to-day begins. In this and the three following verses, our Lord seems to change the subject, and call our attention to His Second Coming.

'And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.' It is difficult to say whether this should be taken literally or not. Some think that the darkening of the sun and moon, and the falling of the stars, is intended to describe the overturning of kingdoms, and the pulling down of princes from their thrones. Whether it means this, or that wonderful appearances shall actually be seen in the heavens, it is very difficult to say. In any

case, it is clear that striking events will take place. And as, during a storm, the ocean roars, and wave rolls upon wave, dashing against the shore, and each fresh wave is more violent than the last, so will it be with the judgments ready to fall on the unbelieving. And great will be their alarm ; 'men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth ; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.' The terror will be so great, that men, ungodly men, will faint, and be ready to die, in view of what is coming.

Such will be the case in the prospect of what Jesus is here speaking of ; namely, His own appearing. 'And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.' What a sight that will be ! How awful to the unprepared ! How glorious to the people of God ! 'And when these things begin to come to pass (He adds) then look up, and lift up your heads ; for your redemption draweth nigh.'

Our Lord, having thus called attention to His Second Coming, in the twenty-

fifth and three following verses, He now seems to go back to the overthrow of Jerusalem in the few next verses, and speaks a kind of short parable; 'Behold the fig-tree and all the trees; when they now shoot forth ye see and know of your own selves (that is, without any one informing you) that summer is now nigh at hand.' If we see leaves and buds upon the trees, we feel sure as to the season that is approaching: 'so likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye, that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.' The signs which He had mentioned were intended to serve as warnings to the Jews; that God's judgments upon their city and nation were very near. And when He said, 'Know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand,' He evidently meant to lead His people to believe that He was about to lay the foundation of His gospel kingdom, which should spread over the whole earth. And further He tells them that these woes on Jerusalem, and this beginning of gospel days, should come to pass before the present generation should die out; 'Verily I say unto you, This

generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my word shall not pass away.' And sure enough, before forty years had rolled by, the Roman army invaded Judea, Jerusalem was conquered, the Temple destroyed, and the people scattered.

Having endeavoured then to explain the difficult passage before us, let us now dwell for a few minutes on the *two events* here spoken of. One is past: the other is yet to be accomplished.

1. Jerusalem, with its Temple, was destroyed nearly 1800 years ago. As a nation, the Jews had grievously offended God; and they had just been adding to their other sins the sin of rejecting the Saviour, whom God sent to them. The storm of His anger had been long brooding, and was now ready to burst upon them. Jesus plainly warns them of the coming woe. He tells them that even in the lifetime of that generation all would be accomplished.

The mass of the people refused to believe this announcement. They 'set at

naught all His counsel, and would none of His reproof.' He spoke plainly, but they would not see; He spoke loudly, but like the deaf adder they stopped their ears; He spoke lovingly, but their hearts remained untouched. Not one jot or one tittle however of the Saviour's word remained unfulfilled. He told them *what* to expect, and *when* it should all come to pass. And that word came true, for within forty years their proud city was trodden down by Roman soldiers; the Temple, the glory of their land, with its goodly stones, was demolished; and the people, for their sins, were driven into all parts of the world, and have never since been gathered.

But there were *some* in that unbelieving city who escaped. Who were these? They were Christ's little flock, a few of His own followers, who were then living at Jerusalem. These, believing their Master's words, acted upon them, and fled from the devoted city at the first rumbling of the threatened storm. *They* found shelter at a little place in the neighbourhood, called Pella, and altogether escaped, while the rest were exposed to the most awful sufferings.

And now let us turn our thoughts to *the other event*, which is yet to be accomplished, and which most deeply concerns us, the Second Appearing of our Lord in power and great glory.

Jesus *has* appeared once, bringing salvation to a lost world. And when He had atoned for man's sins by the shedding of His own blood, He returned to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. But before His departure He distinctly promised that He would again appear among us, not as a lowly Saviour, but as a glorious King ; not to suffer, but to reign.

Now it is to this, His Second Coming, that He refers in some of the verses before us. And surely there is no subject more deeply interesting, or of more vast importance to us, than this.

Those who have refused to believe in Christ, and have neglected His great salvation, must needs look forward to that day with dread, if they look forward to it at all—if, I say, they look forward to it at all. For it is wonderful how Satan succeeds in keeping away such thoughts from

the minds of men. Just as you may draw off the eyes of a child from looking at some glorious object in the distance, by placing immediately before it something utterly trifling in itself, but which is attractive for the moment; so the evil one often keeps us from dwelling on high and heavenly things which are afar off, by calling our attention to the passing events of this present world. Or again, at other times, he persuades us that such subjects as our Lord's Second Advent are too deep and mysterious for us to dwell upon. By these and other means he effectually keeps a great truth like this out of our thoughts.

And yet our Lord *will* come, and that perhaps speedily, whether we look out for His coming or not. There is no one truth more plainly declared than this—that He who ascended into heaven will so come in like manner as we have seen Him go into heaven. *When* He shall come, *how* He shall come, *where* He shall come, we know not. But that He *will* come God's word declares to us in the plainest language.

And are there not times when even the most worldly are *forced* to think of

that approaching day? And if the thought *does* come before them, it must fill them with alarm. The thought of meeting a rejected Saviour, and of looking upon the face of Him whom they once scorned—to remember that He would have saved them, and would have gathered them under His wings, but they would not—to think that His loving arms were thrown wide to welcome them, but now those arms are closed against them for ever—ah, this will indeed cause them to fear and tremble!

Every true disciple of Christ however will think of the Saviour's return with very *different* feelings. The thought of it will fill him with joy. He loves his Saviour now, and what can be more delightful than the prospect of seeing Him as He is, and being with Him, actually with Him, for ever?

I know of nothing more warming to our cold hearts, more quickening to our feeble faith, more likely to kindle a flame of holy zeal within us, than the prayerful expectation of the Master's return. 'Lift up your head,' says our Lord, 'for your redemption draweth nigh.' We may well

lift up our heads in the happy prospect of our complete redemption, our full salvation, our entire and everlasting deliverance from sin and misery, and our admission into His presence, where there is fulness of joy for evermore.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

MATT. XI. 2–10.

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them: And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? a reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? a prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

As Christmas draws near, our Church directs our attention to one or two points in the history of that holy man, who came to prepare the way for Christ.

To-day we read of his sending two of

his disciples to Jesus, to make certain inquiries of Him. John the Baptist was now in prison, having been sent there by order of Herod. That wicked king had married his brother Philip's wife, and John had fearlessly reproved him for his sin.

Whilst he was confined in the dungeon, tidings from time to time reached him of what Jesus was doing, and of what men thought of Him. And we read here that he sends two of his disciples to inquire of Him if He was indeed the promised Saviour—the great Deliverer sent from God, whose coming had been so often foretold.

Why he made this inquiry we cannot tell. There may have been some doubts in his own mind whether He, of whom he had lately heard so much, was the same one whom he had himself baptized, and whom he knew to be the Messiah. He had indeed borne a noble testimony to Christ. He had declared Him to be the Son of God. He had spoken of Him as a Being far greater than himself. He had called attention to Him as 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the

world.' But now as he lay in prison, gloomy thoughts perhaps came over him, and doubts sprang up in his mind, 'Can this be the great Deliverer of Israel?'

Such *may* have been the case; but I should rather be inclined to think that John knew Jesus to be the Christ. He was persuaded of it himself, but he wished to satisfy the minds of his followers, and therefore sent two of them on this errand.

The question they put to Jesus was, 'Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?' Now had Jesus answered with a mere Yes, or No, a doubt might still have existed in their minds. He therefore points to His works. 'Go,' He says, 'and tell John what you see me doing, and what you hear me saying; and judge whether my actions and my words answer to the description given by the Prophets. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up.' Now all this was just what the Prophets had told concerning Him; and especially Isaiah, when he said, 'The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be

unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.'

These miracles proved Him to be the Messiah; for though many of the Prophets also had worked miracles, none had wrought such wonders as He had done. Jesus moreover performed them in His own name, and by His own power; but they had done them by the power of God. Here, then, were plain proofs that He was indeed the Christ.

Again, our Lord bids them carry back a report of *the truths* which He delivered, and *the persons* to whom He delivered them. 'The poor have the Gospel preached unto them.' This too was foretold; for did not Isaiah say, speaking in the name of the coming Saviour, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound?' Yes, that good news was now proclaimed to the very poorest. Others had delivered their mes-

sage to kings and princes, whilst the poor were overlooked as unworthy of notice. But Christ singled out the lowest and the neediest, and offered His salvation to them.

Such was His answer to the messengers of John. And feeling that they might possibly go back disappointed, seeing the meanness of His appearance, the poverty of His followers, or the strictness of His doctrines, He adds, 'Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.'

They may have expected something grander and more striking in the outward appearance of the Messiah. And it is possible they may have shown some surprise that the poor should rally round Him, rather than the rich and mighty. And therefore He whispers to them a word of caution; 'Let not this be a stumbling-block to you. Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.'

And are *we* not in these days sometimes offended by the words of Christ? Are they not too humbling for us? Do they not require us to stoop very low? When Jesus says, 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life,'

does not this seem too strict for us? When He says, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me,' do we not feel a little shrinking from a course which is so difficult? When we are told that we must trust in a despised, suffering, and crucified Saviour; that we must be stript of every other hope, and submit ourselves to Him, do not our proud hearts rebel?

If we are ever troubled by such a feeling, let us remember that Jesus fully understands our difficulties; and that He has pronounced a special blessing on such as shall receive Him without hesitation, and are not offended in Him.

But to return to the verses before us. The messengers from John the Baptist, having satisfied themselves that Jesus was indeed the Christ, go back to their Master full of their important visit to the Saviour. And one can imagine the deep interest and joy with which he must have listened to all they had to tell him. For though he could no longer hear the Bridegroom's voice himself, yet still as 'the Friend of

the Bridegroom,' it must have brought comfort to his heart to receive such blessed tidings of Him. Ah! he cared little for those prison walls in which he was shut up, so long as he could know that the word spoken by Christ had 'free course, and was glorified.' The gloominess of his dungeon was brightened by the thought, that the Sun of Righteousness was fairly risen upon a dark world.

On the departure of the messengers, Jesus turns to the multitudes around Him, and speaks to them of John the Baptist. He knew that they had gone in crowds to see him, and to hear him, in the wilderness; and He asks them whether they had been disappointed. 'What (He asks) went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?' They expected, perhaps, to find some one weak as themselves—one who would suit himself to their whims and fancies. Instead of that, they found him stern and unbending, uttering hard sayings against sin, and utterly undaunted by the fear of man.

'But what (he asks again) went ye out

for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold they that wear soft clothing are in king's houses.' If they looked for earthly greatness they would not find it in John. If they pictured to themselves one clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day—one surrounded with the pomp and ceremony of a prince—they would be grievously disappointed; for here was a man clad in a rough garment, and leading a still rougher and more self-denying life.

But He asks them yet once more, 'What went ye out for to see? A prophet?' Did some of them expect to see a prophet, like Isaiah, or Jeremiah of old? If so, there would be something reasonable in this. For truly John was a prophet: 'Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet;' greater than all the prophets that went before him. 'For this is he of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.'

Many of the old prophets were great; but he was even greater. They saw Christ's day, at a distance; but he saw

that day actually dawn. They spoke of His coming as *drawing near;* but *he* could speak of Him as one who *stood among them.* They *prophesied* of Christ; but he could actually *point to Him* and say, 'Behold the Lamb of God!'

Besides, his office was more honourable than theirs! for he was our Lord's forerunner, the special messenger who was sent to prepare the way before Him, according to those words in Mal. iii. 1, 'Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.'

Let us now for a few minutes consider in what manner St. John 'prepared the way' for Christ.

He did so by calling men to repentance. When this great Preacher went out into the wilderness, crowds flocked around him. And most stirring and striking were his addresses to them. He spoke plainly to them of their sins, and called upon them to repent and forsake them. He entreated them to 'flee from the wrath to come.' He blew the trumpet; and it sounded far and near, awakening the slumberers, and lead-

ing them to inquire what they must do. His great object, you will observe, was to bring men to *Repentance.* His call day after day was '*Repent ye.*' His baptism was not the full Christian baptism; but it was a baptism of *Repentance.* Thus it was that he prepared men to receive Christ. He endeavoured to break up the stubborn soil, to soften hard hearts, and so make them ready to welcome the Saviour's offer of pardon and mercy.

Again, he prepared the way by announcing that *Christ's kingdom* was going to be set up. He preached, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' And he urged men to press into it.

But further, he directed sinners to *Christ Himself.* He pointed to Jesus, saying, 'I cannot deliver you. See here your Deliverer! Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'

And then, when men began to rally round Christ, St. John's work, as the Saviour's Forerunner, was done. He had cleared the path, as it were. He had *prepared the way;* but Christ was *the Way* itself. St. John was a *light-bearer;*

but Christ was '*the Light*' itself. And just as one star after another pales away as the day dawns, and at length is altogether hidden when the sun bursts forth, so did the Prophets, and even John himself, retire into the background the moment Christ proclaimed Himself as the Light of the World.

Oh that Christ's ministers may, like John the Baptist, be faithful to men's souls; may boldly reprove sin, and delight in directing penitents to the Saviour, shewing that pardon, and life, and peace are to be found only in Him! And may we all remember that the day is near when the Lord will come and reckon with His servants—when His ministers shall be called to give an account of their stewardship, and His people of the talents committed to their charge! And may we do it 'with joy and not with grief!'

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ST. JOHN, i. 19–28.

This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that Prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that Prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not: He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

TO-DAY, again, our thoughts are chiefly directed to John the Baptist, the Forerunner of our Lord. He was at this time at a place called Bethabara, on the other

side of the river Jordan. He had been preaching to the multitudes who had gathered around him, and he was now engaged in baptizing them as his followers.

Whilst he was thus occupied, certain messengers arrive from Jerusalem. They were persons of some importance; for we are told that they belonged to the Jewish priesthood, and to the sect of the Pharisees. So that we may suppose they were men of learning and authority. They had been sent by some of their brethren, who were very anxious to ascertain who this unusual Preacher was. They had heard of his making his appearance in the wilderness, and riveting the attention of the people by his stirring words. There was something strange in the truths he uttered, and in his manner of delivering them. They had learnt too that he was gaining great influence over the people, and that numbers were daily joining his ranks.

They began therefore to think that it was time to interfere. And the first step they took was to send these messengers to obtain some information concerning him.

The report had probably gone abroad that he professed to be the promised Messiah, the Christ. But upon their questioning him as to who he was, he replied that he laid no claim to so great an honour. He candidly told them, 'I am not the Christ.' Who, then, could he be? they inquired. 'Art thou Elias?' And he said, 'I am not.'

The Jews believed that Elias (or Elijah) would himself return from heaven to live among them; and they promised themselves great things from his coming. Hearing then of John's character, preaching, and baptism; and observing that he had suddenly appeared like one dropped from heaven; it is no wonder that they were ready to take him for Elijah. It is true that Malachi had foretold his appearing *under the name of Elijah*:—'Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.' (Mal. iv. 5, 6.) But John the Baptist was not Elias; not that

Elias who went up to heaven in a chariot of fire. He was the Elias that God had promised; but not the Elias that they foolishly dreamed of. He came 'in the spirit and power of Elias;' that is, he came after the same holy model, greatly resembling Elijah in many points of his character.

Once more they asked him, 'Art thou that prophet;' the prophet of whom Moses spoke? And again he answered, 'No.'

They then pressed him to give them at once the information they desired, that they might satisfy their brethren who had sent them. 'What sayest thou of thyself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.' He gives his answer in the words of the prophet to show that the Scripture was fulfilled in him, and that his high calling was of God. He tells them that he was only a Herald, a Servant, a Forerunner; that 'voice crying in the wilderness,' of which Isaiah spoke; and that his errand was to 'make straight,' or prepare, 'the way of the Lord.' Just as any great king,

in ancient times, sent messengers before him to clear the way for his journey, and to make straight a path for him, so was St. John sent to prepare men's hearts to receive the promised Saviour.

Having informed them that he was neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the great Prophet to whom Moses pointed, they now put yet another question to him—a question as regards his *conduct.* They ask why, if he was not one of these great personages, he took upon himself to baptize men. The Jews quite understood what baptism meant; for it was not altogether a new ordinance to them. They had long been accustomed to baptize the converts who came over to them from among the heathen. But what authority could *he* have for baptizing? It looked as if he was anxious to win over to himself as many as possible, and enrol them as his followers—to raise, in fact, a party around him, and thus to establish his own greatness.

Now, mark his answer; and see how full he was of true humility, and how he desired to take the lowest place, that his Master might be honoured and exalted.

'I baptize (he said) with *water*.' By this he meant that he considered his only an outward baptism; and that it had nothing saving about it. His object was merely to enlist under his banner as many as were willing to forsake sin, and to place themselves under his direction. 'But,' he adds, 'there standeth one among you whom ye know not.' He draws attention to the Saviour, and tells them that He was at that moment actually standing among them, hidden in the crowd, unknown and unnoticed by them. 'He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me.' Thus he directed them to Jesus, as one far greater than he was. And then he declares himself utterly unworthy to perform the meanest office for him; 'whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.' If you turn to Matt. iii. 11, you will find his words given more fully, and you will see how humbly *he* spoke of the Baptism which he administered, but with what reverence he regarded that higher Baptism which *Christ* would presently give them; 'I indeed baptize with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is

mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire.'

This then was 'the record,' or testimony, which John bore, both concerning himself and concerning the Saviour whom he announced.

Let us now for a few minutes dwell on St. John's character, as it came out on this occasion.

His *humility* and *unselfishness* are very remarkable. He speaks of himself in the lowliest terms. He glories in his own inferiority, and the Saviour's greatness; 'The strings, or latchets, of his shoes I am not worthy to unloose.' Most of us are proud of any little honour that may be paid us, or of any success that we may meet with; and we are disposed to make the most of it. But the more grace we have in our hearts, the lower we shall seem in our own eyes, and the less we shall desire the praise of men. Happy those who have learnt to feel their nothingness, and are content to lie low in the dust; who are willing to be little

thought of by their fellow-men, because they know how undeserving they are in God's sight. John the Baptist was greater than all the Prophets who lived before him; and great too was the work which he came to do; but still he was willing to keep himself in the background, and to disclaim all earthly greatness. And do we not often see that those are the *best* workers who are the *humblest* workers; those do the *greatest* deeds, who are content to be the *least* thought of; those speak *best* for Christ, who say *least* of themselves? It was so with John.

And this leads me to another remark concerning him. How anxious he ever was to *direct men to Christ*. This is a striking feature in his character. He pointed to the 'Lamb of God,' as the one who could 'take away the sins of the world.' And when he thought of the Saviour's greatness, and of his growing kingdom, he exclaimed, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' He seemed, as it were, to say, 'My little course will soon be run. My work, which is but small, will soon be accomplished. And then I shall

stand back, and make way for my Lord and Master. He is the Bridegroom, and I am only the Bridegroom's friend. I am but a little star, that shines for awhile, and then will set; but He is the Sun of Righteousness, ever shining with a brighter glory. I am now gathering a few followers around me; but He is the Mighty One who will draw all men unto Him. And though He may now be little thought of, yet to Him every knee shall bow, and all shall one day call Him Lord.'

Is Christ great and glorious in *your* eyes? Are you looking to Him as 'the Lamb slain' for you, as the Sun of your soul? Are you turning to Him for present help, and present peace? Are you ready to welcome Him, who came, as at this time, into the world to save you? Is your mind prepared for the Joyful Festival of Christmas, which is near at hand? Believe in Him whose birth we are going this week to celebrate. Seek His salvation, while it is within your reach. Run into the open arms of His mercy.

We have read to-day of some who knew Him not, though He stood among

them. Ah, and He is very near to us. He is about our path, and about our bed. He is watching our steps, and is ever ready to help us and to bless us.

How sad, if like the Jews, we know Him not. Oh that He would graciously reveal Himself to us all; so that we may indeed know Him, and love Him, and faithfully serve Him! Then will this coming Christmas be a happy, blessed season to us; a season of holy mirth and heavenly joy. For if Christ is ours, then truly shall we 'rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

CHRISTMAS DAY.

St. John, i. 1–14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.

This is a very important portion of God's word, and one specially suitable for this high and joyful Feast Day. We have in it a clear declaration both of the Godhead

and the Manhood of our Blessed Lord. We read here of One, who being God to save, as well as Man to suffer, was wonderfully fitted for the great work of our redemption.

May God help us by His Holy Spirit, whilst we examine these verses, and enable us to lay hold of the precious truths which they contain!

You will observe that Jesus is here called *the Word.* This seems to have been a favourite name with St. John; for not only here, but in his Epistles also, he calls Him by the same title. Look at the opening verses of his First Epistle; 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the *Word of life.*' And again in the Book of Revelation, which was also written by St. John, he thus describes our Lord (chap. xix. 13), 'He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called *the Word* of God.'

And here, too, he opens his Gospel with these noble words, 'In the beginning was

the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

Why Jesus should be called by this title, *the Word*, we can easily understand. Our words express our meaning, and without words there could be no intercourse between us. So Christ is the means by which God holds intercourse with man; as St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Hebrews, 'God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days *spoken unto us by his Son.*' Therefore that Son is called *the Word* of God.

And now see how plainly St. John here declares His Godhead; 'The Word was with God, and the Word was God.' He does not merely say that Christ was great, or that He came from heaven, or that He was the Son of God, but that He actually, *was God.* He existed from the very beginning, before the world was. He was with God in heaven, sharing His glory; and more, He was *God Himself.*

And then St. John adds, 'All things

were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.' He was the great Creator of the world. He took part in the work of creation. St. Paul speaks of this fact in the Epistle to the Colossians; 'By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth—all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.' (Col. i. 16, 17.)

But in the verses before us, Christ is further spoken of as *the Life*, and also as *the Light*, of the world. 'In him was *life*; and the life was *the light* of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.'

He was *the Life*; for in Him alone can dead souls live. He seems to say to us, 'You are dead in trespasses and sins; but I can raise you up to a new and better life. Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help. I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly. I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whoso-

ever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.'

Yes, He was *life*, the life of a dying world. What the Saviour was when He stood at that open grave of Bethany, and said to Lazarus, 'Come forth,' such is He spiritually now: He is the life of the world. And He was *light* too, the light of a dark world. Just what the sun is, when it rises after the darkness of the night, such was Christ. He was 'the Sun of Righteousness,' 'a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel.'

When St. John says, 'The light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not,' he meant that Jesus came to teach an ignorant and benighted world; but that the darkness was so thick, that the blessed rays of light could not pierce through. It was as you sometimes see on a misty day; the sun makes an effort to shine through the fog, but to little purpose; the thick mist still remains. And so it was with most men at the Saviour's coming. The Light shone, but they did not welcome it. They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

It is said in the sixth, and three following verses, that St. John the Baptist bore testimony to Jesus, as the Great Light. 'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' St. John was himself 'a burning and a shining light' among men. He did his part faithfully and well. But Christ was *the* Light; the great Light that came down from heaven.

This was the glorious Being, who as on this day made His appearance in our sinful world. He left heaven for a while; He parted with His glory for a season; and came among His creatures on an errand of the purest love. And Christmas Day is the day on which we celebrate His coming.

And how was He received? When He appeared among us, did men, one and all, bow before Him? Did they say, 'He is come to save us; we will welcome Him, and open our hearts to greet Him? We

will meet Him with our warmest thanksgivings, and praise Him for His goodness. We will serve Him with our best and holiest service?

Was this the feeling of mankind, when He stood before them? Alas! no. What does St. John tell us in the 10th and 11th verses? 'He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.' The greater part looked coldly upon Him. He came into *His own world;* but that world knew Him not, and received Him not. He came to *His own people*, the Jews; but they scorned Him, and turned away their faces from Him. It was precisely as the Prophet had foretold; He was 'despised and rejected of men;' they saw 'no beauty in him, that they should desire him.'

But St. John here adds that there were some — few in number, but still some — who did receive Him gladly; 'But as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.'

Most blessed were those first Followers

of our Lord. Blessed was St. John himself and others, who rallied round the Saviour, and gave Him their whole hearts. And blessed are *we*, if we have counted the cost, and given up all for Him, taking Him for our Lord and Master, and surrendering to Him our undivided affections. To us also He 'gives the power (that is, He grants to us the high privilege) to become the sons of God.' He gives us a place among God's adopted children.

And how was it that these first converts believed, and joined themselves to the Saviour, when all around them were against Him? They were brought to Him by the leading of the Spirit. They were 'born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' And so it is with every one now who becomes a disciple of Christ. 'No man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.' No man can feel the preciousness of Christ, except he is born from above. 'No man can come unto me (says the Saviour) except the Father which hath sent me draw him.'

And now look at the last of these

verses which we are now considering, the 14th. Here the Apostle speaks of our Lord clothing Himself in our flesh, and dwelling among us for a time as man; 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.'

That was a happy day, a glorious day, when the Virgin Mother gave birth to her Child, and laid Him in the manger, for there was no room for Him in the inn. Those who were there at the time little thought that this helpless Infant was the most blessed Being that had ever come into the world, and that He was God in the form of man. His appearance was like that of other children. And for many years I suppose that no one—not even His mother—knew the full extent of His greatness. For thirty years He lived in retirement at Nazareth, unknown and unnoticed. But when He came forward on His mighty errand of salvation, every now and then His greatness showed itself. When He healed the sick, or quelled the storm, or raised the dead, He proved Himself to be

more than man. And when He opened His lips, 'He spake as never man spake.' Thus 'we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.'

We cannot hear to-day the Angels' voices, as the shepherds heard them on the plains of Bethlehem, saying, 'Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour;' 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men.' We cannot kneel before the Redeemer, as the wise men did, who brought Him their offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But then God sends His messages to us to announce to us the same good tidings, and to tell us that 'unto us is born a Saviour.' And there is not one of us but can go and worship Him, bringing to Him what He values more than the costliest gifts, the offering of a willing heart.

These verses which have been selected by wise and holy men for our Gospel to-day are most precious. They are 'like

apples of gold in a picture of silver.' Let us prize them highly, because they tell us that Jesus is God, and therefore almighty to save—that He is also man, and is therefore touched with a feeling for our infirmities, and is as a Friend and a Brother to every one who trusts in Him. He is *the Word*, too; and is ever ready to speak peace to our souls. He is *the Life;* and if we truly believe in Him, we shall never die. He is also *the Light;* and if we follow Him, 'we shall not walk in darkness.'

What do we want more? This seems to meet all our need. Here is a Saviour, who can satisfy every craving of our hearts, and can fill our soul's emptiness. Are you sad and trembling to-day on account of your sin? Apply to Jesus for pardon: He can blot out every stain. Do you feel that you are weak, and that your way is difficult? Ask Jesus to help you. He has strength to give you, and grace sufficient for you.

O then let our hearts rejoice. Whilst many are looking around, and saying, 'Who will show us any good?' we will say, 'Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy

countenance upon us. Thou, O blessed Saviour, shalt be all our desire, our support in life, our hope in death, and our portion throughout eternity.' 'Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!'

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

St. Matt. i. 18–25.

The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost: And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins. (Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.) Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son: and he called his name Jesus.

Have you not observed that sometimes, when rain comes after a long drought, it does not merely last for a few hours; but for some time after, for days it may

be, there are falling showers which continue to water and refresh the ground? So it is with those blessed truths which are poured out so abundantly upon us at Christmas time. It is not merely on Christmas day that our Church announces the joyful news of the Saviour's birth. The sound of these glad tidings lingers day after day in our ears. The drops continue to fall. Thus we find the Gospel of to-day *still* speaking to us concerning the birth of Him who came to redeem us.

Our Lord's birth was no ordinary birth. It was altogether miraculous. And as the time drew near that Mary should bring forth her Son, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, directing him to take her to his own home, and without fear to treat her as his espoused wife, for 'that which was conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost.' And then the angel adds, 'She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins.'

St. Matthew tells us moreover that all this was a fulfilment of an ancient prophecy, which Isaiah delivered, saying,

'Behold, a Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel.'

When Joseph awoke from his dream, he at once did as the angel of God had bidden him. He took Mary to his home at Nazareth, where they remained until a few days before the Saviour's birth; for you know that He was not born there, but at Bethlehem. And then, when she had brought forth her first-born Son, they gave Him that name which God Himself had chosen, the blessed name of JESUS.

What must have been Joseph's feelings after this vision? He must have felt the holiest reverence for his espoused wife, mingled with the purest love. She was to be the Mother of the promised Messiah. That which had seemed so strange and mysterious was all ordered by the Holy Ghost. It was the Lord's doing, and it was marvellous in his sight.*

Such, in the main, is what we may gather from the simple account given us by St. Matthew. There are three points,

* See Young's 'Daily Readings'—an excellent work.

on which it will be well for us to dwell for a few minutes.

First, as to our Lord's *earthly Parentage*. When 'the Word was made flesh,' when Christ appeared on earth in our nature, He might have chosen a palace for His birthplace, and kings and queens for His earthly relations; for even that would have been a vast condescension. But no, He chose to stoop still lower. He chose to come, not in the form of a king, but in 'the form of a servant;' to be born of one who was in a lowly condition; to be laid in a common manger; and to live for thirty years in the humblest dwelling.

Joseph was a carpenter at Nazareth, without any pretensions to worldly greatness. But, as he was a just and holy man, he was great in God's sight. Mary, I suppose, belonged to the same class; and of her spotless purity and holiness we have many proofs.

Some have fallen into the great mistake of actually worshipping her. This is clearly an error, and is utterly contrary to the plain teaching of Holy Scripture. We ought however to look upon her as

'blessed among women.' We should *honour* her, because God honoured her in making her the Mother of our Lord. When He 'took upon him to deliver man, he did not abhor the Virgin's womb.' We should *admire* her, because of her holy and consistent life. And we should *love* her, because Jesus loved her.

Next, let us direct our attention for a moment to *the Prophecies* concerning our Lord's birth.

Not only was it foretold that Christ would come, but *the Place* where He should be born was mentioned, and that a very unlikely place; for Bethlehem was a town of little note in the land of Judæa. The Prophet Micah however spoke of it as our Lord's birthplace 700 years before His coming. And so clear was this to the Jewish priests and scribes, that when Herod, in his great alarm, inquired of them where they expected the Messiah to oe born, they answered without hesitation, 'In *Bethlehem* of Judæa; for thus it is written by the Prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the

least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.'

Then, the *Family* from which the Saviour was to spring was also foretold. He was to be born of the seed of David, as Jeremiah foretold, in chap. xxiii.; 'Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.' And this was the reason why Joseph and Mary went up to Bethlehem shortly before the time of her delivery; for St. Luke tells us that Joseph 'was of the house and lineage of David.' And there the Child was born, just as the Prophet had foretold.

Again, *the Mother* who was to bear Him was mentioned. She was to be a Virgin Mother; 'Behold (says Isaiah, in chap. vii.) a Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.' This prophecy

is referred to by St. Matthew in the passage before us; and he uses this expression, 'Now all this was done, *that it might be* fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet.' He does not, I think, mean by these words that our Lord was born of a virgin, *in order* to make the words of the Prophet come true; but rather that all this took place, and so the prophecy was fulfilled. The truth is that all was foreseen in the mind of God, and holy men of old 'wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.'

And now a word or two as to *the Name* by which our Lord was specially to be called. I say *specially*, because other names are given to Him in holy Scripture. In to-day's Gospel, for instance, two others are mentioned.

In v. 18 He is called *Christ;* 'Now the birth of Jesus *Christ* was on this wise.' The word 'Christ,' or Messiah, means the Anointed One. When kings and prophets were set apart for their office, they were anointed with oil. And so, when our Lord came, He was called 'the Christ,' or the Anointed One.

In v. 23, we find Him called by another name, *Emmanuel*, which word being interpreted, or explained, means *God with us.* This was a glorious name, reminding us that He was God in our nature—a man like one of us, but at the same time 'God over all blessed for ever.'

But we now come to the name by which He was *specially* to be called—the name which was announced from heaven—the name chosen by God Himself. This was the angel's direction to Joseph, 'Thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins.'

The name JESUS is the same as Joshua. This should be borne in mind; or else what sense can be made of such a passage as Acts, vii. 44, 45, where St. Stephen, speaking of the Jews and of their Tabernacle, says, 'Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with *Jesus* into the possession of the Gentiles.' The 'Jesus' mentioned here is evidently Joshua, who

succeeded Moses and led them into the possession of Canaan. So again, if you look at Heb. iv. 8, you will see that 'Jesus' is used for Joshua. Speaking of the Israelites, St. Paul says, 'If *Jesus* had given them rest (that is, 'if *Joshua* had given them rest in Canaan), then would he not afterwards have spoken of another day.'

And if we bear in mind the meaning of the name of Jesus, we shall see how admirably suited it was to Him, who came to bring salvation to the lost, and recovery of the ruined. It means *a Saviour*, one who shall *save His people from their sins.*

Can any name be more welcome to us than this? Can any name be more sweet to a believer's ear than this name of Jesus?

> 'It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
> And drives away his fears.'

St. Paul in writing to the Philippians says of Christ, that 'God also hath highly exalted him, and given him *a name* which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.' Now, it is from this passage that we get our custom

of bowing at the name of Jesus. Of course when St. Paul said that 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,' he did not mean that we should never take that holy name into our lips without making a bodily sign of our respect. But what he did mean was, that all should humble themselves before the Saviour, and that every heart should yield itself to Him. Still it is a good custom in our Church to bow at the name of Jesus, especially when we rehearse the Creed; for thus we show our love and reverence for Him, and remind ourselves that He is the Almighty Being to whom we owe our very hearts.

How much meaning there is in this name of Jesus—one who shall 'save his people from their sins!' It tells us that He did not come to condemn the world, but to 'save' it—that He did not appear among us as our Judge, but as our Deliverer.

It tells us too *how* He saves; namely, by delivering us 'from our sins.' Never yet did He save any one who loved his sins and clung to them. This cannot be. The 'Woman which was a sinner,' whom

Jesus pardoned, was a *contrite* sinner. The Thief, whom He saved upon the cross, was a *penitent* Thief. He works in our hearts a feeling of hatred for sin, and then delivers us from its punishment, and from its indwelling power. He does not make *allowance* for our sin, but He makes an *atonement* for it. He gives His people no liberty *to go on* sinning; but He grants them deliverance from the cruel *bondage* of sin. He sets them free. He 'redeems them from all iniquity.'

Oh, that He may be all this to us! And having such a Saviour, may we 'cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God!'

THE CIRCUMCISION, AND SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

St. Luke, ii. 15–21.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

We are told in these verses,

1st. What the Shepherds did, when they had heard the news of the Saviour's birth;

2ndly. How Mary, the mother of Jesus, acted; and

3rdly. What happened to our Lord, when He was yet but eight days old.

First then, what step did the Shepherds take, as soon as they had heard the news of the Saviour's birth?

These Shepherds were plain simple men, but evidently men of thoughtfulness and piety. They had been tending their flocks on the plains of Bethlehem. And in the stillness of the night a heavenly Messenger had appeared to them, and announced the joyful tidings of the Saviour's birth. He had told them where they would find Him, and what were the signs by which they might know Him. The Angel, having fulfilled his errand, is joined by a choir of the Heavenly Host, who fill the air with their loud hosannahs.

And now, when these Angels had departed, what did the Shepherds do? Did their flocks once more occupy all their thoughts? Did they lay themselves down to sleep, and put off till the morrow any further concern about the news which they had just heard? No; they felt it was something which so deeply interested them, that they proposed to one another to proceed forthwith to Bethlehem, in search of this great and wondrous De-

liverer; 'Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.' Oh that *we* were more ready to encourage one another to seek the Saviour! Oh that we were more anxious to stir up one another to come at once to Him, whom to know is life eternal!

You observe they did not speak doubtfully, saying, 'Let us go and see whether it be so or not.' But they felt the fullest assurance; 'Let us go and see this thing *which is come to pass.*' There was no room in their minds for any doubt; for *the Lord* Himself had *made it known* to them. They therefore went in the full persuasion that their errand would not be in vain; and they saw at once the greatness of the blessing which had been announced to them. They felt their need of a Saviour; and without a moment's delay they started in search of Him.

Happy men, to be so much in earnest, and to feel so strongly the preciousness of the blessing now brought within their reach! How long their journey was we are not told. It probably took them some

hours to reach the little town of Bethlehem. But the distance was nothing to them, so intent were they on their errand. As they hastened on, they conversed no doubt about the wonderful Messenger who had appeared to them, and called to mind every particular which he had mentioned. Their minds were full of this one subject, and they could speak of no other.

On reaching Bethlehem, they proceeded to the spot which the Angel had described to them. They singled out the inn, and made their way to the stable in which the Holy Family were gathered; and there to their inexpressible joy 'they found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.'

One can imagine with what holy reverence and affection they drew near to the infant Saviour; how they bent their knee before Him, and gave Him all their hearts. And then, fully satisfied with their remarkable visit, they return spreading far and near the tidings of what they had heard and seen. But this was not all; they lifted up their grateful hearts to God, and praised Him for all that had happened.

Thus they became, as it were, the first preachers of the Gospel, proclaiming to others what had brought such exceeding joy to their own hearts. And in this way we should *all* be preachers; for if we have been led to seek and to find a Saviour for ourselves, clearly it is our duty to make Him known to others, to tell out to them the discoveries which have been made to us.

So much for the Shepherds—those humble but holy men, who were honoured by being the first to hear of the Redeemer's birth, and to proclaim it to their brethren.

2ndly. Let us now turn to Mary. She perhaps knew not as yet how great and glorious a Being lay cradled in that rough manger. She knew that there was something altogether mysterious about the birth of this her first-born child. She felt that He was a holy Child, and that great indeed was her privilege to bring Him into the world. But as yet she 'knew only in part.' She 'saw through a glass darkly.' The Angel Gabriel had told her many things con-

seeing the Infant Child; and how her interview with her cousin Elisabeth she had gathered more. The Shepherds too had just related to her all that had passed in the last few hours; and probably every word that the Angels had spoken was carefully repeated to her. Her willing ears drank it all in; and she saw in some measure how vast a blessing had come to the weary sin-stricken world. Every circumstance they mentioned must have been deeply interesting to her, and made her feel that He whom she pressed to her bosom was something more than a common child.

And so we read that she 'kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.' She said little, but she *thought* much. Her mind was full of calmness and peace; but there were many things to stir her very soul within her. She tried perhaps to picture to herself what that little Child would one day be, so great and so glorious. And yet perhaps she had her forebodings, as to how He would be received in the world, and what He would suffer for His people's sake.

She 'kept all these things.' She kept them locked up in her heart; for no one could understand them but herself. And yet there was One above, who could enter into all her deepest feelings; and it must have been no small comfort to her to tell them out to God, and then to leave it with Him to reveal yet further whatever He might see it good for her to know.

And have there not been times with us, when *our* thoughts and feelings have been too deep for utterance? Others have spoken much, but we have been silent. Many things have passed through our minds, which we have told to no one but to Him who knows all. And as we opened our hearts to God, we have felt a peace, which He alone could give us; and we have exclaimed with the Psalmist of old, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.'

We must now leave Mary in her quiet thoughtfulness, and see,

3rdly. What happened next to the Infant Saviour.

We read in v. 21, of His being cir-

cumcised. You must remember that both Joseph and Mary belonged to the nation of Israel. They were both of them pious members of the Jewish Church. According then to their own law it was necessary that the Child should as soon as possible be circumcised, as the children of Christian parents are at an early age baptized.

Thus then you see that our blessed Lord, from His earliest days, conformed to all the ordinances which His heavenly Father had appointed. He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. And who shall say that ordinances are a mere form, when Jesus Himself observed them? Circumcision was not a mere outward ceremony to the Jew; else Jesus would not have submitted to it. Baptism is not a mere outward ceremony to the Christian; else Jesus would not have been baptized. No, both are something more than forms. The one was the entrance-door into the Jewish Church of old, and the other into the Christian Church now. The Jew could not be admitted into God's family without circumcision, nor the Christian without baptism. Circumcision was intended to remind

the Jew of the necessity of cutting off and mortifying all his evil and corrupt affections, and of leading a holy life. And Baptism is intended to remind us of the inward washing of the soul. Our whole life should be a constant circumcision, as it were; a continual cutting off and casting away of all worldly and sinful desires. We should be 'continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living.' Thus in the Collect for to-day we pray that God, 'who made His blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man, would grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit, that our hearts and all our members being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey His blessed will.'

Such is the true 'circumcision of the Spirit,' which He looks for in us Christians, and which His grace alone can enable us to carry on.

There is one special circumstance mentioned connected with our Lord's Circumcision, which we must not pass over. It

was customary with the Jews at the time of circumcision to give the child its proper name, as we give it to our children at their baptism. And now that name was given to our Lord, which the Angel had already announced to Mary—that name which is above every name—that name which is so full of meaning, and so full of mercy—'Thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins.' And so we read that 'When eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the Angel before he was conceived in the womb.'

Sometimes there is but little in a name. But this name is full of most precious meaning. It breathes abundant mercy to the penitent. It tells the sinner that there is hope for him. He need not lie down in despair, reckless and lost. There is a Saviour for him, even JESUS, who can 'save his people from their sins.'

With this name, buried deep in their hearts, the early Christians lived in peace, and died with a joyful hope. With this name, inscribed upon their banner, they

went forth conquering and to conquer. With this name upon their lips the first preachers won souls to God. And is not this name dear to every believer now? It speaks to him of pardon. It whispers peace to his soul. It cheers him in the darkest hour. It opens to him a way to the very throne of God; for through that all-prevailing name we draw near to Him.

May the name of Jesus be to us 'as ointment poured forth!' May it cheer our hearts in sorrow! And when death comes near to us, may we then feel its peculiar sweetness! May that name ever be our refuge and confidence, our strength and support, our peace and consolation!

Jesus! Name of wondrous love!
Name, all other names above!
Unto which must every knee
Bow in deep humility.

Jesus! Name decreed of old,
To the maiden Mother told,
Kneeling in her lowly cell,
By the Angel Gabriel.

Jesus! Name of priceless worth
To the fallen sons of earth,
For the promise that it gave—
'Jesus shall his people save.'

Jesus! Only name that's given
Under all the mighty heaven,
Whereby man, to sin enslaved,
Bursts his fetters, and is saved.

Jesus! Name of wondrous love!
Human name of God above!
Pleading only this, we flee
Helpless, O our God, to Thee.

THE EPIPHANY.

St. Matt. ii. 1–12.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them, where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go, and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they

presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

THE word 'Epiphany' means manifestation, or making known. And this season of the Epiphany is intended to remind us of Christ manifesting Himself, or making Himself known, to the world, and especially to the Gentiles.

The day is sometimes called also *Twelfth Day*, because it is the twelfth day after Christmas, and in former times the Feast of Christmas lasted during the whole of these twelve days.

Our blessed Lord came, as you know, specially to bring salvation to *the Jews*. His chief mission was to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' The first offers of His mercy were to them; and all His early disciples were of the Jewish nation. Here and there however we read of a Gentile, or Heathen, drawing near to Christ. But it was not till about eight years after our Lord had ascended into heaven that any great number of Gentiles were admitted

into the Christian Church. Then the gospel was proclaimed to all alike, to the Gentile as well as to the Jew; and the door of mercy was opened wide to every one who would enter in.

The Shepherds, of whom we read last Sunday, were Jews. But the Wise Men, of whom we read in the Gospel to-day, were Gentiles like ourselves. It seems that they were inhabitants of some country at a distance from Jerusalem—somewhere to the East—perhaps Persia or Arabia.

At this time there was a general expectation in the countries of the East, that some great one would be born among the Jews, who would be a King over all the world. And these men, who are here called 'Wise Men,' or Philosophers, by some means or other heard the tidings of the Saviour's birth. God perhaps revealed it to them, and directed them to follow the guiding of a particular star, which would lead them to the spot where they would find Him. Most likely this star was not one of the ordinary stars in the heavens, but what is called a meteor, some unusual light which served to guide them on their way.

Their brethren around them no doubt thought that their errand was a rash one. What folly to believe in a Saviour whom they had never seen! What madness to trust themselves to the guidance of a star! However, they went forth in simple faith; and after travelling for some days, and encountering perhaps many difficulties, they arrive at Jerusalem. And immediately they begin eagerly to enquire, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.' How much or how little they knew concerning Him who was born King of the Jews, we are not told. They seem to have looked upon the star as a fulfilment of the promise they had heard of. And so, having gathered some treasures together, they came with their gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, to do Him honour.

The sudden appearance of these Foreigners, and the pressing inquiries which they made, created of course no small stir at Jerusalem; and the news soon found its way to the palace of King Herod, and filled him with much anxiety and

alarm. Who was this mysterious Person, whom these men were searching for? They spoke of Him as 'the King of the Jews.' But who could this rival King be? Then the account of an unusual star appearing staggered him; and at the moment he appeared to see the hand of God in it.

Herod was now an old man. He knew that he could not enjoy the throne much longer; but still he did not like to hear of another King of the Jews, and so he determined if possible to get rid of Him.

He instantly calls together the chief Priests and Scribes, and consults them. They were the most likely persons to throw some light on the matter. Had they heard anything of this Saviour King? No; it would seem that the report of His birth had not yet reached them; or if it had, they had taken no notice of it. All they knew was that in their Holy Books a Deliverer was spoken of, and his coming promised; and in one of these Books, written by the Prophet Micah, they read that Bethlehem was the place where He should appear, the little town of Beth-

lehem, which was only six miles to the south of Jerusalem. The words were these, 'And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel.'

Upon this, Herod, who was evidently much struck by what he had heard, sends for the wise men, and desires to have a private interview with them. He makes further inquiries of them as to the appearance of the star, and particularly as to when they first saw it, that he might take measures accordingly. And he then gives them the information he had gathered from the priests, recommending them to proceed immediately to Bethlehem, and charging them to return to Jerusalem, and report to him the result of their visit. 'Go (said he) and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.'

In the wickedness of his heart, he pretends that he feels the same interest as they felt in this new-born Saviour.

He therefore speeds them on their errand, charging them, if they succeed in the object of their search, to bring him back the news; that he may also go, and do Him honour. His anxiety might perhaps have awakened their suspicions, if he had not thus covered it with a show of religion.

They at once depart, full of hope, and no doubt greatly encouraged by their interview with Herod. Why should they suspect anything wrong? Why should they not believe that he, like themselves, was anxious to fall down at the Saviour's feet and worship Him?

And now they start off winding their way through the city, and leaving it by the Bethlehem gate. And presently when they lifted up their eyes, they beheld once more their guiding star. This told them that all was right, and that God was still directing their steps; and instantly a thrill of joy ran through their minds. Feeling that God was with them, they hasten on, till presently the star stops in its course, resting over Bethlehem, and pointing out the very spot where the young Child was.

We read that 'when they were come

into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother; and fell down and worshipped him.' From this we may gather, I think, that Mary and her sacred treasure had left the stable which had served for the Saviour's birth-place, and perhaps also the inn; and now they were tarrying in some neighbouring house, in some hired lodging. Here they find the holy Infant and His Mother; and falling down before Him with lowly reverence, they worship Him, and present to Him the offerings they had brought with them from their Eastern home—'gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.' It was customary at the birth of a Prince, to show respect for him by making him offerings of this kind, and indeed this custom is still common in the East. And never were gifts brought with more willingness than by these strangers. They did what they could; and what they presented was the freewill offering of devoted hearts.

And now, having paid their visit—a visit on which their minds had been so eagerly set—a visit which must have filled their hearts with the purest joy and thank-

fulness—they leave Bethlehem, and turn their faces homewards. Instead of taking Jerusalem on their way, they carefully avoid it; for they had received a warning from above, telling them of Herod's falseness, and charging them to beware of him.

It is clear that Herod had but one object from the very first. And that was, to quench the light that had arisen, and to destroy if possible this rival King. And this was the reason why he was so desirous to obtain every information from the Wise Men, who had come in search of Him. But his plans were completely foiled, and his evil intentions disappointed, by God's special interference.

Such is the account which St. Matthew gives us of the visit of these Wise Men of the East to the Infant Saviour. Some think that they were Eastern Kings; and that the remainder of their lives was spent in the service of God; and also that in them were fulfilled those prophecies of old; '*Kings* . . . . shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet;' and again,

'The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and *Kings* to the brightness of thy rising;' 'Yea, all *Kings* shall fall down before him.'—Isa. xlix. 23; lx. 3; Ps. lxxii. 11.

Be this as it may, we may learn much from the circumstance, which we have been dwelling upon.

And, First, our Church, in calling our attention to the Epiphany, would have her members show their *gratitude* to God for manifesting, or making known, the Gospel to the Gentiles. At one time the Jews alone were God's peculiar people: but now all who come to Him by Christ are admitted into His kingdom. 'In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.' The 'wall of partition' is mercifully broken down, and all are now 'one in Christ Jesus.' If it had not been so, *we* should still have remained afar off, 'without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.'

Think of this, and be thankful. Be

thankful to God, that He not only allowed those strangers from the East to draw near to Jesus, but that He permits *us*, to do so who are also strangers of the Gentiles. And the more we value our blessings as Christians, the more anxious let us be to make those blessings known to others. Let us be more earnest in the great work of missions. Let us take a more real interest in what is doing to make known the Gospel in distant Lands.

Secondly, we may learn a *humbling* lesson from these Wise Men of the East. They had no spiritual advantages in their own Land, for it was a land of heathenism. And yet their conduct puts *us* to shame. They undertook a long and difficult journey at God's command, without being stopped by danger or ridicule; for doubtless they had to encounter many a scoff and many a sneer from their heathen neighbours. But whilst the Jews who lived at Jerusalem would not go to the next town even to bid the Saviour welcome, these men travelled miles to worship Him. And so is it with many of ourselves. It has been

well said, that those who are nearest to *the means* are often farthest from *the end.* And hereafter, it is to be feared, that many will come from the east and from the west, and will sit down with Abraham and Isaac in the kingdom of God; but *we* perhaps, *we* who are the children of the kingdom, shall be cast out.

But there is a Third thing we may learn, and that to our *encouragement;* namely, that God will guide those who are really anxious to find the Saviour. He directed these Gentiles by a star. And has He not not given us our Bibles, our Churches, our Ministers, and above all His Holy Spirit, to lead us to the knowledge of Christ? These are so many stars as it were to guide us. And even if for a time the light should seem to be withdrawn, yet it will assuredly again appear, and direct us on our way.

Happy those who are seeking Christ with all their hearts! They shall not seek in vain. They 'shall know, if they follow on to know the Lord.' But happier still are they who have *found* Him—who can

say, 'My beloved is mine, and I am His. My soul rejoices in Him, as my Saviour to redeem me, and as my King to reign over me. I was once afar off, like the Gentiles in the East, but thank God I have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ.'

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

ST. LUKE, ii. 41–52.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem ; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed : and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them : but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favour with God and man.

FOUR things are told us in this passage of Scripture—

1st. Our Lord's visit as a child to Jerusalem;
2ndly. His conversation with the doctors in the Temple;
3rdly. The mistaken reproof uttered by His Mother;
4thly. His dutiful submission to His earthly parents.
Let us take these in order.

First, as to our Lord's visit to Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary were pious members of the Jewish Church. They 'walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' Year after year they went from Nazareth to Jerusalem to attend the great Passover Feast. And they did this, not as a matter of duty merely, but because they loved the House of God, and the religious gatherings of His people. At twelve years old it was customary for Jewish children to accompany their parents on such occasions. And as Jesus had now reached that age, they took Him with them, anxious that He should share their privileges, and join them in their acts of worship.

They therefore left their humble dwelling at Nazareth, and joined their friends and neighbours who were bent on the same errand. Nazareth was about seventy miles from Jerusalem; and such a journey in those days was a matter of no small difficulty. They usually travelled in large companies for the sake of protection; and as there were scarcely any regular roads, it would probably take them a week or more to complete the journey.

The Passover lasted eight days; one day for killing the Paschal Lamb, and seven days for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And now the Holy Week being over, and the Festival ended, the many thousands who had met at Jerusalem mustered in the outskirts of the city, and started on their homeward journey; and Joseph and Mary among the number. But Jesus was not with His parents. This however did not cause them much concern, as they took it for granted that He was with some one or other of the Nazareth party.

It is supposed by some that the men and women travelled in separate com-

panies on these occasions. And that the children were sometimes in the men's company, sometimes with the women. This would account for what might otherwise seem to be carelessness on the part of Joseph and Mary. Joseph, not seeing Jesus in the men's company, might suppose He was with His mother; and Mary, not finding Him with her, might imagine that He was with Joseph.

Thus they journeyed on for a whole day; and not till the evening did they discover that He was altogether missing. They then at once halted, and retraced their steps to Jerusalem, anxiously inquiring where He could be.

After some time they find Him in the Temple. This brings us to our *Second* point—our Lord's conversation with the Doctors. Who were these 'Doctors?' They were public Teachers, or Rabbis, who were there to give the people instruction in matters of religion. Here, among these Elders, was the last place where they would expect their child to be. But here they find Him, not drawn there

by mere curiosity, but actually taking part in their discussions. For we read that He 'was found sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.' There is no reason to think that this was for the purpose of perplexing or confounding them. The 'questions' were doubtless proposed in a respectful manner, and the answers listened to with deference to the age of those who made them, and respect for their sacred office. But our Lord's wisdom must greatly have surprised them; for like David he could truly say, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers. I understand more than the ancients.' And so we read, 'All that heard him were astonished;' and well they might be, for never child spake like this Child.

Of course His parents had already had many opportunities of observing the wisdom which marked even His earliest childhood. But this must have been the first opening of their eyes to see that He possessed a power of mind far beyond that of an ordinary child. He now gave them as it were *a taste* of His divine wisdom

and knowledge. He allowed a few rays of His glory to beam forth, but they were soon withdrawn again; for the time was not yet come for Him to show Himself in all His greatness.

But let us now see, *Thirdly*, how our Lord's parents addressed Him. We find Mary speaking to Him somewhat reprovingly; but it was a mistaken reproof. 'Son, (she said) why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing?' As much as to say, 'Thou hast acted wrongly in thus tarrying behind, and causing us so much anxiety.' They knew not as yet that there was a hidden reason for all He did, and that He could never act wrongly. And even when He replied, 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' it did not satisfy them; for we read, that 'they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.'

And yet how much there was in those few words, of which afterwards they no doubt saw the full meaning. 'My *Father*' —they understood not as yet all that

expression signified. They knew not that He was the eternal Son of God—God's equal, and yet their child—the Ancient of Days, and yet a growing youth—the Lord of life, and yet one over whose infancy and childhood they had anxiously watched.

'My Father's *business*' too—what could that business be? Jesus had come to do a great work, which as yet they understood not—a work which He never lost sight of all the time He was upon earth—a work for which He was now preparing Himself—a work on which His whole heart was set.

It is well if we can feel something of His devotedness. It is well if that thought is uppermost in our minds, so that all else gives place to it; 'I must be about my Father's business.' There is a work which God has given each one of us to do; a work for Him; a work suited to our powers; a work for the accomplishment or the performance of which we shall be called upon to give an account.

How many of us not only neglect this great work, but make the world's business an *excuse* for neglecting it! 'I have so much to do in my worldly calling, that I

have no *time* for the things of God. Earthly business *must* be attended to, and my Father's business must therefore for a time at least be put aside. I have bought five yoke of oxen, and cannot come.'

Shame upon us, that we should ever dare to use such language as this! And yet such is the feeling of some, if they do not utter the very words. How sad, if we allow anything earthly to interfere for an instant with the great and pressing work of God—if we allow the world and its claims to call us away from our heavenly Father's business, which is of far more importance to us than ten thousand worlds.

There is meaning too in that little word 'must;' 'Wist ye not that I *must* be about my Father's business?' He seemed to say, 'Do you not sufficiently know me, to be sure that the great object of my life is to be ever doing my Father's will? And though, perhaps, you cannot understand what I have now been doing, still you may be certain that I must be employing myself about something that concerns Him Who sent me.'

And, oh, that *our* character may be such, that when men do not understand our motives, or the particular work in which we are engaged, they may be ready to say of us, 'He *must* be about his Father's business. This we know is the object nearest to his heart, and doubtless it is this that he is endeavouring to carry out.'

These few words, this single sentence, is all that we know of as having fallen from our Lord's lips—all at least that has been handed down to us as spoken by Him, during the first thirty years of His life among us. And therefore they are very precious words; and though Mary at the time only half understood them, they evidently left a deep impression on her thoughtful mind. 'His mother (we read) kept all these sayings in her heart.' The sweet sound of them lingered in her ears. They came back to her again and again. And the more she discovered of the true character of her beloved Son, the more meaning she saw in that short sentence, 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?'

The two closing verses of our Gospel tell us of our Lord's return to Nazareth, and of His childlike submission to His parents: 'He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.' What an example for us! how perfect and complete! He who was Lord of all, acted as an obedient son to Joseph and Mary; increasing year by year in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

This is all we are told of His life at Nazareth, till at the age of thirty He came forth publicly, and announced Himself as the Saviour of the world. During those thirty years He shared the labours of Joseph, working with His father as a common carpenter. In that workshop He toiled, unknown and unnoticed. In that peaceful home He lived as a dutiful and affectionate Son, and as a holy Servant of God. The particulars of His home life are hidden from us. But we may well imagine what a calm and constant sunshine must have brightened the very atmosphere He lived in.

To us all, but especially to the young,

the thought of that early life at Nazareth is most precious. Think often of the holy Child Jesus. Think how He would have spoken and acted, and try to be like Him. Let your temper, your feelings, your conversation, be such as you may suppose His to have been. Especially pray that as you grow in years, you may 'increase in wisdom and in favour with God and man.' Pray, too, that you may ever be 'about your Father's business;' that you may love, above everything, to be doing His will, desiring nothing so much as to please Him, who is dearer to you than the dearest ones on earth.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

St. John, ii. 1–17.

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him.

In the first chapter of St. John's Gospel he relates to us some circumstances con-

nected with the calling of our Lord's first disciples; and in the closing verses He dwells more particularly on the Saviour's interview with Nathaniel.

On 'the third day' (that is, on the third day after that interview) an event occurred in the little town of Cana, which gave Jesus an opportunity of working His first miracle. There was a marriage-feast there; and as Mary the Mother of Jesus was present, and also Jesus Himself, it is more than likely that it was to celebrate a marriage among some of Mary's relations or near friends.

Picture to yourself this festive gathering. There was a room full of guests, and tables spread with food and wine suitable to the occasion. There was 'the governor of the feast,' who presided; and the bride and bridegroom, in whose honour the entertainment was given. Then there were the special friends of the married couple. And among them was one, whose quiet, thoughtful manner must have drawn many eyes and hearts towards her, and whose character was such as to call forth respect and affection from all who were present.

This was Mary, the Mother of Jesus—she who was declared to be 'blessed among women,' and who ever breathed around her an atmosphere of peace and love.

But there was another Guest yet holier than she—one who was not often present at such scenes as this—one who had so great and pressing a work to do, that He had but a few moments to spare for entertainment of a mere earthly nature.

Some may be surprised to read of the Saviour being at a marriage-feast. But why not? He who could shed tears at Bethany with those who were weeping around their brother's grave, could also rejoice with those who did rejoice. He who could bid the mourning widow of Nain to be of good cheer, could also take part in such a joyous scene as that of Cana of Galilee. He who could turn sorrow into joy, could also by His presence make the joy of His friends more exceeding joyous.

It is a delightful thought that Jesus takes an interest in *the happiness* of His people, as well as feels for them in their *sorrows*. He is with them both in the

bright hour of prosperity, and also in the dark season of sorrow. Whichever be our portion, may He sanctify it by His presence and blessing!

Well, at this feast, among the many guests, was Jesus. In His outward appearance He was much like those around Him. He had as yet performed no miracle. He had not spoken as a Teacher come from God; nor had He declared Himself openly as the Saviour of a lost world. They knew Him only as related to Joseph and Mary—as the carpenter's son of Nazareth. And yet there must have been a something about His countenance, His manner, His general bearing, that made them all feel that no ordinary Person was in their company.

Such was the party now gathered at the marriage-feast of Cana in Galilee. Much that passed there we shall never know—what where the feelings of those who were present—what words of wisdom and of love fell from the Saviour's lips—all this must remain hidden from us.

Towards the close of the feast a circumstance occurred, which at once brought

the Saviour into notice, and must have made them all feel the greatness of Him who was in the midst of them, and had made Himself as one of them.

Suddenly it was discovered that there was a lack of wine for the guests. This was perhaps owing to the humble circumstances of those who gave the feast; or, it may be, that the number of guests was greater than they had expected. Mary, the mother of Jesus, hearing what was the case, and feeling distressed at the difficulty in which her friends were placed, comes to our Lord, and tells Him of the circumstance. She whispers to Him, 'They have no wine.' She had, no doubt, often remarked how ready He had been to help *her* in any emergency; and now she felt that He would be willing, if only He had the power, to help *others*. And it may be that she had a conviction in her own mind that He *did* possess the power, though as yet He had scarcely given any decided proof of it.

Jesus gently reproves her. He perhaps wished her to feel that He, who was her *Son*, must henceforth be looked upon

also as her *Lord*. His reply was intended to check her haste, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.' The time was near at hand when He would have an opportunity of showing forth His glory; and He bids her not be impatient or over-anxious, but wait till that moment had arrived.

He calls His mother 'Woman.' This was not unusual among the Jews, and no severity was intended by it. He addressed her by the same name on the cross. In those farewell and touching words which He uttered as He was dying, He used the same language: 'When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple standing by whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, *Woman*, behold Thy Son!'

The words may sound somewhat harsh in our ears; but they were probably spoken in a tender manner, and with a tone of affection. It is clear that Jesus did not intend to *refuse* to provide, but only to *delay* it a little. Perhaps the wine was not yet quite exhausted. It had *begun* to fail; but He would not work a miracle until it was *entirely* gone. For it is not until all other

help fails that the 'hour' of the Great Helper 'comes.'

It is plain that Mary took His word, not as a refusal, but as only bidding her to wait; for she immediately tells the servants to be in readiness to carry out His commands, whenever they should be given; 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.'

It so happened, that there were in the room some large stone jars, used for the purpose of those many washings which were customary according to the Jewish law. Jesus bids the servants fill these water-pots with water, and then pour it out, and carry it to the governor of the feast. Having done as He desired them, they find to their astonishment that the water is changed into the purest wine. The ruler or director of the feast, who knew nothing of what had occurred, tastes it, and is so struck by its purity and flavour, that he immediately calls the Bridegroom, and expresses his surprise that, contrary to the usual custom, the best wine had been kept to the last.

And is not that true of Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom? Does He not keep the

best till the last? The world gives its best first. Worldly things often *begin* well, but *end* badly. The brightness of morning ends in the darkness of night. The buds and blossoms of spring end in the decay of winter. Hope is often followed by disappointment; and life itself ends in death. But with Christ it is different. The Law which condemns is followed by the Gospel which saves. The Christian's earthly trials are succeeded by heavenly joys. First comes the cross, and then the crown. The Christian's course brightens ever more and more. He mounts a ladder, whose top reaches unto heaven. 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' Truly, the heavenly Bridegroom keeps the good wine until the last.*

Such was the miracle which comes before us in the Gospel for to-day. It was the first miracle that Jesus had wrought. It was a miracle which showed more plainly

* See Young's 'Daily Readings on the Life of Christ.'

than almost any other the Almighty power which He possessed. And thus He was pleased to 'manifest forth His glory.'

And why did He not display it on all occasions? Because He chose to keep it back. It is true that His whole life was far above the life of ordinary men. The feelings which actuated Him were higher feelings than were to be found in others. And there was a wisdom and a charm in His words which was most unusual. He both spoke and acted 'as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'

But then this was only discovered by those who were much with Him, and had learnt to value Him, and to love Him. The people generally looked upon Him as a great Teacher, and nothing more. They saw no glory in Him, when He said, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.' They saw no glory in Him, when He sat down to meat with 'publicans and sinners;' or when He toiled along the road to Calvary, bearing His cross. And even when He performed many of His miracles, He did them in so quiet and re-

tiring a manner, that they made no stir, and drew from the beholders no applause. More than once too, when the people seemed to discover something of His glory, and were disposed to pay Him unusual honour, He shrank from it, and refused it.

It might have been otherwise. His earthly course might have been one continued stream of glory. His coming into the world might have been attended with such miraculous signs that all would have seen that He came from above. He might have given constant proofs that He was God as well as man. He might have walked through this world, with His heavenly nature so plainly stamped upon Him, that none could mistake it.

But then men's faith would not have been called forth. This was perhaps the reason why He concealed His Godhead, and kept it in the shade ; and only at times sent out a ray or two to leave the unbelievers without excuse, and to strengthen the faith of His own true people. But every now and then, there was something, either in His words or in His actions, which showed Him to be more than man. One

of these occasions was this Marriage-Feast. Then it was that Jesus wrought His first miracle, and 'manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.'

There is, I believe, only one other miracle which is said to have brought conviction to the minds of men; and that was the raising of Lazarus. After Jesus had restored him to life, we are told, 'Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.'

One can imagine a miracle to have been very surprising and startling. But I am inclined to think that the faith so produced would be but a poor faith after all, and not one likely to last. If God were to speak now with a voice from heaven, or were to put forth a hand, and write upon our walls some mysterious words, it might alarm and awaken the thoughtless, and yet their hearts might remain still unconverted.

Have *you* been aroused, and are you convinced that the gospel is true, and that Christ is the only Saviour? Rest not

there. Ask God to influence your heart by His grace; to give you the faith that saves; to shed abroad His love in your heart by His Holy Spirit; to make you a new man. Ask Him to give you, not merely a momentary *conviction* however strong, but such a lasting *conversion* as shall lead you to turn away from sin to God and to holiness.

It is not Christ and His *miracles* that we so much need, as it is Christ and His *cross*. 'The Jews required a sign, and the Gentiles sought after wisdom;' but the Apostles preached 'Christ crucified,' 'Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.'

Blessed were those guests in the marriage supper-room at Cana who beheld the Saviour's glorious power; but happier still was the heart-stricken thief who beheld Jesus on the cross, in all the weakness of His dying agony, and felt that He was mighty to save. And may we not add, even more blessed are 'they that have not seen, and yet have believed.'

In our Marriage Service we are re-

minded that 'holy matrimony is an honourable estate,' and that our Lord 'adorned and beautified it with His presence and first miracle which He wrought in Cana of Galilee.' On such happy occasions we should specially desire Christ's presence, and Christ's blessing. For truly if He is there—if our union is begun, continued, and ended in Him—then may we look for happiness, and all will be well with us for time and for eternity.

May Christ be with us at all seasons, whether joyous or sorrowful! May He, who was Himself a Guest at the Marriage-Feast at Cana, gladden us with His presence! May He fulfil to us His gracious promise, 'I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me!'

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

St. Matt. viii. 1–13.

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man, but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say unto this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast

out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.

Two striking miracles are brought before us in the Gospel for to-day—the healing of the Leper, and of the Centurion's paralytic servant.

Our Lord had just been delivering that address to the people, which is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount; and 'when he was come down from the mountain (we are told) great multitudes followed him.' Many had been drawn towards him, as they would have been drawn towards any strange and stirring preacher. Some too had heard from His lips that which gave comfort to their souls; and more than one felt so drawn towards Him, that they could not leave Him.

And now, as Jesus and His hearers came down from the mountain, a poor forlorn creature appears in the distance approaching them. Clearly he had not been in the crowd; for if he had attempted to mix among them, they would have driven

him away with horror; they would have fled, rather than have run the risk of his touching them.

He was one of those wretched Lepers, whose disease was of such a dreadful nature that they were forced to dwell alone, far away from the haunts of men; and who, wherever they went, were forced to warn men of their approach, crying, 'Unclean, unclean'—wretched from their loathsome disease, and still more wretched from being outcasts from their homes, from those whom they loved, and from all their fellow-men.

Such was the miserable being who now approached the Saviour. He must indeed have had a keen sense of his misery, he must have greatly longed for relief, or he could not have faced that multitude. He must too have had a strong persuasion of the Saviour's power to heal him, or he would not have dared to present Himself before Him.

And now, whilst the multitude is looking on, and wondering what will happen, he falls at our Lord's feet with a look of pitiable earnestness; and knowing to a certain degree in whose presence he was,

he exclaims, 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.' He acknowledged *the power* of Jesus to heal him. All he doubted was if He would condescend to look upon such an one as he. But the Saviour's very look must have encouraged him. There must have been something in His loving countenance which seemed to say, 'None are beneath my regard. None are too miserable for me to look upon. Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.'

But what must have been his joy, when he heard the words, 'I *will*: be thou clean!' In an instant the weary burden, which he had borne perhaps for months or years, seemed to fall from him. His festered skin had suddenly the appearance of perfect health. His leprosy, which had long been considered incurable, was cleansed. All he had now to do was to go and show himself to the priest, according to the Jewish law, and receive from him a certificate that he was indeed a cured man, and might now once more associate with his brethren.

He is charged to tell no one. And why so? Our Lord gave him this caution for

some wise reason. Perhaps because, if the miracle should be much spoken of, either His own safety just at that time, or the safety of the cured man, might be endangered; for it was not an occasion like that mentioned in the Gospel for last Sunday, when Jesus specially desired to 'manifest forth his glory.' Or perhaps our Lord only meant to caution the leper to say nothing about his cure until he had been to the priest, and received his authority to join the congregation; lest if he heard of Jesus having wrought the miracle, he should withhold his testimony out of mere jealousy.

And may not *we* receive encouragement from our Lord's conduct towards this leper? May we not gather from it that He is both *able* to save us, and also *willing?* Ah, if we feel the leprosy within, and if we have learnt something of our own loathsomeness, it is a blessed thing to know that there is in Jesus not only *the power*, but also *the heart*, to heal us. We may come with full confidence to Him, knowing that He is ready to whisper in our ears those welcome words, 'I will; be thou clean.'

Our Lord now leaves the spot where He had wrought this work of mercy, and goes to Capernaum. And there another miracle is performed. It may have been on the same day, or it may have been several days after: it matters not. Let us now turn our thoughts to this second miracle.

A Centurion comes to Him; that is, a Roman officer, the captain of a hundred soldiers. He was not a Jew probably, but a heathen. He comes, not on his own account, but for another; not suffering in his own person, like the leper, but pleading for his suffering servant; 'Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.'

There was something very touching in this request. He was a soldier, brought up to hardship. His very calling was one that might have steeled his heart against the pains and wants of others. But no, he had a servant hopelessly ill, and he felt for him as he would for his own child. He therefore comes to Jesus, whom he looked upon as the great Physician from heaven.

Our Lord receives him with the same

kind welcome that He had given the poor leper. He at once answers, 'I will come, and heal him.' This was more than he expected, and even more than he wanted; 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof;' I deserve not so great an honour; 'but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.' And then he adds, 'For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.' As much as to say, Even I have authority over others, and my word has its effect. I have only to issue my orders, and this and that soldier obeys me. How much more must it be so with Thee!

His words were not lost upon our Lord. He knew their value, and expressed His approval. 'When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel'—not even among those from whom one might expect it; much less from one who has had so few advantages as this man. 'And Jesus

said unto the Centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.'

There are four points in this last narrative, which I specially wish you to notice.

The first is, the Centurion's great *humility.*

That our Lord should condescend to enter his house, and that those sacred feet should step over his threshold, he felt to be too great an honour for one so undeserving. He was evidently a humble man. And when he compared Jesus with himself, he felt the amazing distance between them—the one so full of power, the other so weak; the one so holy, and the other so compassed with infirmities! No wonder that with these feelings he exclaimed, 'Lord, I am not worthy.'

Oh for more of the Centurion's humility! Surely the more we know of Christ, of His power, His love, His holiness, the more we shall be emptied of our pride. Go to Him in the same lowly spirit, and He will receive you favourably. Say

to Him, 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; not worthy that thou shouldest enter this sinful heart of mine, and dwell there. Cleanse it of all that is impure. Drive out every unholy thought, every wrong desire, everything that is displeasing to Thee. Expel 'the strong man armed' that 'keepeth his palace;' and let the 'stronger than he' take possession. Enter Thou the abode which Thou hast cleansed, and dwell there for ever.'

I believe that many of us drive the Saviour from us, because we come not to Him in this meek and humble frame.

The second point that I would have you observe is the Centurion's *faith*. How strong it was! To believe that our Lord could come and heal his servant—that would have been faith. The conviction that if Jesus entered his dwelling, and stood by his servant's sick bed, He could restore him—that would have been faith. But he believed even more. He believed that Jesus could cure him at a distance—that He had only to speak the word, and

the disease would leave him—this was a faith that even Jesus marvelled at.

But I would have you observe, thirdly, the circumstances which made his faith so remarkable. He was a Gentile, a heathen. Our Lord lays stress upon this; 'I have not found so great faith, *no, not in Israel.*' Among all the Jews who have believed on me, I have not found one with so strong a faith as this Roman soldier.

And now hear the warning which Christ gives in consequence; 'I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This warning was addressed by the Saviour to the Jews around Him. But it comes home to ourselves. They were the children of the kingdom *then*. They had long been the special objects of God's favour. 'To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the

giving of the law, and the service of God and the promises.' They were the people of God. And just what they were *formerly* we are *now*. We, Christians, are the children of the kingdom. We are Christ's people, 'heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

But high as our standing is, it will not ensure our salvation. Some poor heathen may have a more earnest desire to be saved than we have; he may, with all his disadvantages, know something of Christ, and long to know more, whilst we may be resting on a mere outward acquaintance with Him. Many in this Christian land, many who have been baptized in the Christian Church, will be shut out hereafter; and many a heathen, who has only just heard of the Saviour, may come to Him with a penitent and believing heart, and find mercy.

Ah, we shall be judged according to our opportunities. Blessed are those, who, though they have received little, have profited by that little! But most sad is their state, who, in the midst of privileges, have no living faith in Christ, and no true love towards Him!

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

St. Matt. viii. 23–34.

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us, we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! And when he was come to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And behold they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine, feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told everything, and what was befallen to the possessed of the

devils. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

HERE, as well as in the Gospel for last Sunday, we have two distinct miracles related to us; namely, the quelling of a storm at sea, and the calming of two persons disturbed by the possession of devils.

The quelling of the storm is the first in order. Jesus, as we are told in v. 5, had gone to Capernaum, a small fishing town on the borders of the Sea or Lake of Tiberias. After staying there a short time, being somewhat troubled by the multitude of people that flocked around Him, He determined to 'depart unto the other side.' For this purpose He entered a ship belonging to one of His seafaring followers; and being probably weary with His unceasing labours, and night coming on, He calmly fell asleep.

Meanwhile the sky became dark and threatening. The wind blew, and whistled loudly through the rigging. And so violent was the storm, that the waves dashed over the ship, and it was in great jeopardy.

The crew, who were most of them our Lord's disciples, alarmed at the danger, went to Him, and awoke Him from His sleep. They felt that no time must be lost, and that He alone could protect them. 'Lord, save us: we perish,' was their earnest and bewildered cry.

Jesus, who was at this moment as composed as if He had been on dry land, gently reproved them for their want of trust, saying, 'Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?' He does not blame them for disturbing *Him* in His sleep, but being so disturbed *themselves*. Neither does He charge them with actual *unbelief;* for if they had had *no faith*, they would not have applied to Him in the hour of danger. But what He finds fault with is *the weakness* of their faith; for if it had been stronger, they would have trusted Him, and felt that they must be safe, so long as He was with them.

And is it not often so with *us?* Does not our faith often fail us in the hour of danger? We have plenty of confidence, as long as the sea is calm, and all goes on smoothly; but if the sky above us looks dark, and some trial springs up, we are apt

to lose our confidence and become alarmed. Surely the true Christian ought to 'trust and not be afraid;' for so long as Christ is near—so long as He is in the ship with us—all must, and will, be well.

Our Lord, having reproved His disciples, removes the cause of their fear; 'Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.'

How wonderful! The sea was one moment running mountains high, and danger threatened: the next moment all was calm, and the sea like molten glass. And this was done by a *word*. He stood upon the deck, rebuked the angry winds, and in an instant the troubled waves were still; peace and quietness were restored.

Here indeed was power beyond that of a mere man. He who stood there spoke with the authority of God. A word from His lips awed the tempest, and allayed the storm. No miracle could have shown more clearly that He was truly the Son of God. No wonder that those who beheld it were filled with astonishment, and exclaimed, 'What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!'

How *earnest was the cry* of the disciples for help! They felt there was 'but a step between them and death.' In their terror they betook themselves to Christ as the protector of His people. Oh that as earnest a cry may come from us! In every time of danger may we flee to the Saviour; and may this prayer proceed from our very hearts, 'Lord, save us: we perish!'

How graciously did *our Lord hearken* to their entreaty! It is true He chided them for their want of trust; but His chiding was mixed with tenderness: and then He granted them the help they prayed for. So is He ever ready to succour us, whatever our distress may be.

And how glorious was *the effect!* He did indeed 'make the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof were still.' And, thank God, He can by the same power give peace to His tempest-tossed and afflicted people. He can allay all their fears, and breathe a holy calm into their soul, and then 'the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.'

The next miracle gives us an instance of this, in the case of two persons fearfully possessed by devils.

The ship into which our Lord had entered had now reached the other side of the lake. And no sooner had they landed in the country of the Gergesenes, than two men accosted Him, whose very appearance showed that they were under the influence of evil spirits. Their wretched life was passed in wandering about among the tombs, where they found a shelter from the heat by day, and from the cold by night. They had lost all feeling but that of fierceness and distress.

St. Mark and St. Luke mention but *one* man. They probably speak of the more fierce and afflicted of the two.

When these men saw Jesus, instead of being comforted and soothed by His presence, they hid their faces, and were filled with terror, crying out, 'What have we to do with thee, Jesus thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?'

The devils themselves seemed to be

conscious of our Lord's power, and to feel sure that He would cast them out of the unhappy beings, who were under their evil influence. And they besought Him, if He did so, to suffer them to enter a herd of swine which were feeding close by. Our Lord consents; and on their leaving the two wretched maniacs, they enter into the swine; and immediately the whole herd rush headlong over the cliff into the sea, and perish in the water.

The keepers of the swine fled in great alarm, not knowing who had come among them. And hurrying off to the city, told their story, and described all that had happened, the deliverance of the two men, and the disaster that followed to their herd of swine. The consequence was that the whole city was in confusion. Men, women, and children rushed out of their houses, and hastened to the spot. And when they beheld our Lord, they begged and entreated Him not to remain among them; for they knew not what might happen, and dreaded some further destruction of their property.

And now for two or three remarks upon this miracle.

1. There appears at first sight to be some degree of severity in our Lord's conduct. Was it necessary that the poor dumb animals should suffer, into whom the evil spirits were driven, or that so many lives should be recklessly destroyed?

Our Lord's miracles were, almost all, miracles of mercy. The withering of the barren fig-tree, and the one now before us, were exceptions. In the present instance there was a reason for our Lord acting as He did. The Jews were forbidden by their law to eat swine's flesh: it was considered unclean. If those persons therefore who were keeping the swine were Jews, they were actually breaking God's plain command. And if they were not Jews, but Gentiles, then they were throwing temptation in the way of their brethren. In either case, a just punishment was inflicted on them for what they were doing.

2. It is remarkable how conscious the devils themselves were of the Saviour's authority over them, and how in consequence they dreaded His approach. This

reminds us of what St. James says of those persons who have a mere outward, dead faith. 'Thou believest (he says) that there is one God.' But he adds, 'The devils believe and tremble.' They do not believe, and love the Saviour: they believe, and tremble before him.

It is a sad thing to know Christ and yet to hate Him. But blessed is it to know Him and to love Him. And here is the difference between *saints* and *devils*—the one believes and *loves:* the other believes and *trembles.* May God keep us from such a faith as this last, and give us grace so truly to believe in Christ, that we shall be willing to give Him all our hearts, and to find our joy and peace in Him!

3. The men who came forth from the city to visit the spot where the miracle had been wrought, 'when they saw Jesus, besought Him to depart out of their coasts.' Like many others, they *misunderstood* Him; they mistook His character, and thought Him a hard man, and looked upon Him as a destroyer. But destruction was His 'strange work;' not the work He delighted in. He came not to condemn the world,

but to save it. He came not to smite men with His wrath, but to gather them with the arms of His mercy. He had dealt most tenderly with the poor maniacs only a few minutes before. He had restored them to their right mind, and cast out their tormentors. And He was ready too to bless these very persons, who so anxiously entreated Him to depart out of their coasts. His language was *then*, as it is *now*, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

There is not one of us whom He is not ready to bless. He is still the same gracious, kind, and loving Saviour to all who come to Him. He knows our wants and our misery; and has a balm for every wound, a medicine for every disease.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

St. Matt. xiii. 24–30.

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came, and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto him, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

A PERSON is here represented as sowing good Seed in his field. In the night some malicious enemy comes, and scatters tares all over the ground. The Tares mentioned here are not like our tares; but a kind of grass which very much resembles wheat, though utterly worthless. He is not *seen*

doing this: he does it secretly at night, while his neighbour is asleep. The Farmer sees his crop springing up, and has no suspicion whatever that there are Tares mixed with the Wheat. But when it begins to form into ear, then he discovers the mixture.

His Labourers on the farm express their surprise; 'Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?' He at once guesses what has happened—he has an unfriendly neighbour, and it must be *his* work. The servants then propose to go and gather up all the tares they can find. But the Master objects to their doing this. 'Nay,' he says, 'lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together till harvest-time; and then we will separate them.'

And now for the explanation. Here we have no difficulty; for in this Parable, as well as in that of the Sower our Lord gives His own explanation. It appears that when the multitude were gone, Jesus went into a private house; and there the disciples

followed Him, begging Him to tell them the meaning of what He had been saying; 'Declare unto us the Parable of the tares of the field.'

But before we come to the explanation, there is one expression at the opening of the Parable, which may be misunderstood. Jesus says, 'The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.' Now, what did He mean by '*the kingdom of heaven?*' He certainly could not have meant Heaven itself; for there are no tares there, no evil ones there. It means the Gospel kingdom—the Church of God—Christ's kingdom in the world—that kingdom which Daniel spoke of many hundred years before, when he said, 'I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a *kingdom*. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.' It is well to bear this in mind; for the expression 'the kingdom of heaven' is very often used in the Gospels, and especially in the

Parables. Remember then that it means *the Gospel kingdom.*

Now then let us see what our Lord would have us understand by this interesting Parable.

'The Field,' He says, 'is the World'—this world in which we are now living. 'The good seed are the children of the kingdom'—holy persons, who truly love and serve the Lord, whom the Saviour now reckons among His people, and who will share His glory hereafter. They are brought into His kingdom by the power of His grace. They are His plants, His chosen ones, the wheat which He Himself has sown and cherished.

But to go on. If the 'Good Seed' are 'the children of the kingdom,' what are 'the Tares?' They, says our Lord, are 'the children of the wicked one'—false professors, mock disciples. Satan is their Master and their Father. Though mixed among the precious Wheat, and very like it to the outward eyes, they are but worthless Tares.

Our Lord further explains to us that

'the Enemy that sowed' these Tares 'is the Devil.' For is he not both our enemy, and also the enemy of our Lord? He is ever seeking to ruin us, and to mar the Saviour's work and kingdom upon earth.

'The Harvest,' here spoken of, 'is the end of the world;' and the 'Reapers are the Angels,' whom God will then employ to gather together His elect. 'As therefore the tares are gathered, and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels; and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'

The drift of the Parable then is this—It represents to us the present and future state of the Gospel Church, or kingdom; Christ's care of it; the Devil's enmity against it; the mixture of good and bad

in it, of false and true ; and the separation of the one from the other at the end of the world.

Having thus endeavoured to make clear to you the Parable itself, let us now see what lesson it teaches.

First, we learn here that in Christ's kingdom on earth—that is, in His Church—there is, and always has been, a mixture of bad with the good, of false with the true. In every field there will always be a mixed crop. Take what pains you may, there will be weeds and blighted ears among the corn. There were unclean animals in the ark, as well as clean. There are goats feeding in the same pasture with the sheep. There is chaff on the same barn-floor as the grain. And so here there are Tares mingled with the Wheat.

I say it always has been so. There were Tares in the *Jewish* Church. There were Prophets, 'who wore a rough garment to deceive.' There were Jewish Priests and Rulers, who put on a mere cloak of godliness. There were certain members of that Church, who were unsound mem-

bers. 'They are not all Israel,' says the Apostle, 'who are of Israel; neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children.'

In the early Christian Church too there were Ananias and Sapphira, and other false brethren, who 'crept in unawares.' And even among the very Apostles, the close companions of our Lord, there was Judas the Traitor. Not that Jesus was deceived in him. He could not be deceived. Indeed St. John tells us (ch. vi. 64) that 'Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.'

Sometimes we are ready to ask, How can this be? Can that be a true Church, in which there are false members? Does not St. Paul speak of 'a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish?'

Here, in this Parable, we have the truest answer. The Church will be pure one day, but *not now*. The tares will be gathered out, but *not yet*. Jesus foresaw exactly how it would be. He sowed good seed; but He knew that

tares would come up with the wheat. He prepared us to expect it.

Surely, then, when we are disposed to complain that there are many things around us which are not as they ought to be, we should check ourselves. I go to church, for instance; and the man or woman next to me may not be, according to my judgment, a true Christian. I approach the holy Table, and I see among my fellow-communicants some whose piety I doubt. What then? Am I to be disturbed at this? Ought I to make it a stumbling-stone? Am I to conclude that that cannot be a true Church which has false members belonging to it? Certainly not. I should rather feel that such *must* be the state of things as long as we are on earth. There will be this mixture. I must wait for purity and perfection, till I join the Church above. And meanwhile my chief aim should be—ah, this should be the matter which concerns me—that *I* may not, by any unwatchfulness of my own, bring a blot on my Christian profession.

Secondly, we gather from this Parable

that one of the great objects of Satan is to mix evil with the good—to sow Tares among the Wheat. His grand aim is to spoil the work of Christ.

Does he see brethren living at unity together? He sows the seed of discord among them. He breaks up their unity, and causes divisions.

Or, does he know that the work of grace is prospering in any Christian's soul? He is sure to have some crafty device to check it: and if we are not on our guard he will do so.

Or again, if he sees in any particular place that men are more alive than common on the subject of religion, he will scatter false doctrine among them or lead them into false practice. And he does this to deceive men, and to bring dishonour upon religion.

Be not surprised then, if even among the people of God Satan sows his Tares. Let us be prepared for it, and say, 'An enemy hath done this.'

Thirdly, we may see here the folly of trying to separate the precious from the vile.

There are some forward ones in every Church, some who are a little puffed up with pride, who are ready to cry out with the Servants in the Parable, 'Wilt thou that we go and gather up the Tares?'

Thank God we are not called upon to do this; not that the Tares shall never be plucked up, but that this is not the time, and we are not the doers. Thank God, we are not sent to judge the world, but to spread the knowledge of salvation in it. What are we, that we should presume to set our mark upon the people of God? If we attempt it, we shall perhaps make most grievous blunders. Perhaps we shall thrust out many a humble believer; and perhaps we shall let in many a hypocrite. And there is another thing too. Shall we not be in danger of rooting up some who now appear to be Tares, but who may one day, through God's converting grace, be changed into precious wheat? Oh, what wisdom is there in those words, 'Judge nothing before the time;' 'Let both grow together *till the harvest.*'

And this leads me to speak, *Lastly*, of

that time when *the Separation will take place;* the time of the world's great harvest.

Look at Rev. xiv., and see what St. John says, 'I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the wine-press of the wrath of God.'

Here is the gathering out of the wicked from God's kingdom—the rooting up of the Tares—just what our Lord describes in the Parable before us. 'The Son of man,' He says, 'shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity.'

Christ will then have a pure Church. Every ungodly one will be cast out, every

hypocrite, every one whose heart is false, though his words be fair. His 'people shall be all righteous.'

It is well then not to concern ourselves so much about the condition of others, as about our own. Let us see that *we ourselves* are right with God. Let us see that our hearts beat true to Christ. Then shall we be found among 'the Church of the firstborn which are written in heaven;' among those 'righteous' ones, who shall 'shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'*

* Here, and elsewhere, where the Gospel contains a parable, I have borrowed my explanations from my volume on 'The Parables of our Lord.'

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

MATT. XXIV. 23–31.

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that (if it were possible) they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

IT is not many weeks since we were in the season of Advent; and then our thoughts were much directed to the First

and Second Coming of Our Lord. That was the great Advent subject. But it seems to be the desire of our Church to-day, to call us back once more to the thought of our Lord's Second Appearing. You will see that the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel all refer to it.

In the Collect we pray that 'we may purify ourselves as Christ is pure,' so 'that when *he shall appear again* with power and great glory, we may be like him.' In the Epistle St. John tells us that although we know but little as to 'what we shall be,' yet 'when *he shall appear*, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' And then the Gospel dwells still more on Christ's Second Advent, giving us part of our Lord's own announcement to His disciples on that subject.

He plainly tells us that impostors will come claiming to be the Saviour Himself; 'There shall arise false Christs and false Prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders.' There were many such impostors in the Apostles' days, and especially about the time of the destruction of Jeru-

salem. And about six hundred years later, Mahomet made a considerable stir in the world, claiming to be the great Prophet who was to come, and gathering a vast multitude of followers around him. And others from time to time have sprung up since, declaring that they had a special mission from heaven, and leading away unstable souls. But I think we may gather from this passage that when our Lord's Second Coming draws near, *many* such will come forward, and try to usurp the Saviour's place, deceiving men by pretended miracles, and 'showing great signs and wonders.'

Now, our Lord warns us of this. He tells us of it beforehand, that we may be on our guard. 'If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not. If they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert: go not forth. Behold, he is in the secret chambers: believe it not.' We must turn away from these deceivers at once. We must not hearken to them. We must in no way countenance them. They will come with fair pretensions, with oily words in their

lips, and with golden promises on their tongues. They will come too with a show of greatness, and even of holiness; 'insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.'

But we must not allow ourselves to be entrapped in their snares. We must not be carried away by false appearances. We must beware of wolves in sheep's clothing. We must not 'believe every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God.'

You observe our Lord here tells us that these impostors will come with such charms, that they will deceive, '*if it were possible*, the very elect,' even God's chosen ones, His true people, His own faithful servants. But are not these blessed words—'*if it were possible?*' For it is as much as to say that it will *not* be possible. And why so? Are God's people more clear-sighted than others? Are they wiser than their brethren? Are they able to keep clear of all mistakes? No, surely not. And yet they will not be deceived in this case; and that for two reasons.

First, because they have such a knowledge of Christ, the true One, and they so

love Him, that they will feel towards Him as towards no other. How does the child feel towards its parent? Is there not something peculiar in its love, and different from its love to every one else? Or how do the sheep feel towards their shepherd? 'The sheep follow him, for they know his voice; and a stranger will they not follow.' And the true Christian has such a real acquaintance with his Lord—such genuine affection for his heavenly Friend—he so knows Him in his inner soul, and loves Him with so pure a love—that he will loathe the sight of any one who dares to usurp his place. Others may be deceived, but *he* cannot. Mere professors may be drawn aside; but *he* will be proof against their attempts. This then is one reason why it will not be possible to deceive God's elect or chosen ones.

Do we thus know Christ? Has He manifested Himself unto us, 'as He does not unto the world?' Are we often in His presence? Are we constantly speaking to Him? Is He our Beloved and our Friend? Then, when false Christs appear, we shall not be deceived. When they say

'Here is Christ, or there,' we shall not believe it. 'No,' we shall say, 'it is the voice of a stranger, and not the voice of Jesus whom my soul loveth.'

But there is also another reason why Christ's true people will not be led away. Because God keeps them under His own Almighty care. He watches over their souls, and guards them from their spiritual foes. He hides them under the shelter of His wings. He not only points out the safe path to them, but He keeps them in it.

How liable are we any day to be turned aside from the right way! How easily are we deceived! And therefore how necessary is it for us to look up to God for His protection and safe keeping! If a strange teacher were to come into any of our towns or villages, with fair words and large promises, and pretending to do wonders among us, it is more than likely that he would gain over some followers, especially if he came with an appearance of godliness. But thanks be to God, He can and will keep His own in safety. And every true, decided, faithful Christian, who really loves his Lord, will

be preserved from evil, 'kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.' This is our strength and our safety—that we are not left alone to stumble and to fall, but that He holds us by the hand, checks us when we are ready to go wrong, and guides our faltering steps aright.

And so it will be in that Great Day, of which we have been speaking. Many will be deceived by false Christs and false Prophets. The eyes of many will be blinded; the faith of many will fail; and their love will wax cold. But God's elect will be safe. 'I know my sheep (says Christ) and am known of mine.' 'I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.'

Having uttered this caution about 'false Christs' and 'false Prophets,' our Lord goes on to say that His own Coming will be with the utmost suddenness; 'For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.' The lightning flash comes upon us

unexpectedly; and not only so, but in an instant *it fills the whole heaven* from one end to the other. So will it be with Christ's appearing. Every eye shall see Him. Not one will miss that sight; neither His own people who love His appearing, nor His enemies who will tremble at the thought of it. One and all will behold Him robed in His glorious majesty.

It is added in the next verse, that 'wherever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.' It is very difficult to tell exactly what these words mean. I remarked, when we were considering the Gospel for the Second Sunday in Advent, and this discourse of our Lord (contained in the twenty-first chapter of St. Luke, and also in this chapter) evidently refers to two distinct events—the Destruction of Jerusalem, and also His Second Coming—and that the two are blended or mixed together.

It is generally thought that in this verse our Lord is referring to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. And if so, He declares that He will destroy the un-

believing and corrupt city, as surely and as suddenly as the eagles dart down to seize some carcase on which their eyes are fixed; 'Wherever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.' If however the passage refers to our Lord's Second Coming, then it may mean that His vengeance will surely light on the ungodly; and that where men have provoked Him by their sins and unbelief, on them will His destruction fall.

There is also a difficulty about what follows in the next verse; 'Immediately after the tribulation of those days (that is, the tribulation that had been spoken of in v. 21) shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.'

Some take this literally. They think that the sun and moon will actually be darkened, and that wondrous and unusual signs in the heavens will mark the Saviour's advent. As at the hour of His crucifixion the sun was darkened, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent, so will it be at His second coming. Then what St. John

saw in a vision, and describes to us in the Book of Revelation, will take place; 'The sun (he says) became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell upon the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind; and the heavens departed as a scroll.' Others again suppose that these expressions signify great calamities which will take place among the nations of the earth; such as the overthrow of kingdoms, the dethroning of sovereigns, and other troubles which will come upon the world.

And then, after all this, 'shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn (that is, all the *unbelieving* tribes all who have rejected Him) and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.'

And then too another thing will happen. He will summon His own faithful ones around Him. 'He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together

His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.'

That will indeed be a most blessed meeting. We have already known some happy gatherings on earth. When for instance the scattered members of a family have met after a long separation, there is happiness. When Jacob and his sons were gathered around their long-lost brother Joseph, and their hearts yearned with tenderest affection towards each other, there was happiness. Or when sometimes we have come together in this House of Prayer; and as we have heard the tidings of mercy, and have poured out our souls before God, our hearts have been stirred with the truest love, and we have experienced a joy, which savours more of heaven than of earth, there again is true happiness.

But happy as these meetings are, there is a drawback to most of them: some one perhaps is missing, or something arises to mar the joy that is felt. Far, far more blessed will be that great gathering at the angel's summons—the gathering of God's elect—all the members of His body—all the true sheep of His flock. Not one will

be missing from that number: not a note of discord will destroy the harmony of that happy meeting.

Think of this; and ask yourself, Shall I be there? Am I one of Christ's elect? Have I His mark upon me? Is my name written in heaven?

Oh that the Spirit may bear witness with our spirit that we are truly His—His not merely by profession, but His in heart and in life!

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

St. Matt. xx. 1–16.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a-day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right that shall ye receive. So, when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of

the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

In the foregoing chapter, the nineteenth, we read of a Young Ruler coming to Jesus with an earnest inquiry as to how he could obtain eternal life. And upon our Lord proposing to him to give up his riches, to which he was evidently clinging too closely, he went away with a downcast look and a sorrowful heart.

Upon this St. Peter puts a question to the Saviour, 'Behold, *we* have forsaken all, and followed thee. What shall we have therefore?' Jesus assures him that such should indeed receive an ample reward. 'But,' He adds, at the close of the chapter, 'many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first;' that is to say, many who seem to be the first and foremost are not so in God's estimate. Then follows the Parable.

Now, there was clearly something wrong lurking in the mind of the Apostle, when

he asked the question; and that led our Lord to speak the Parable. St. Peter, you see, wished to know what *their* reward should be, who had done the very thing which the Young Ruler was so unwilling to do—who had forsaken all for the gospel's sake. But the question, 'What shall we have therefore?' was not quite a right one. It was putting their devotedness to Christ on a wrong footing. It was as if they were making a sort of calculation—so much work, so much reward. There was a comparing of themselves with that young man, who had felt the Saviour's proposal too hard for him. This, I think, it was that led our Lord to speak the Parable before us.

Now let us examine it.

Here is a certain Householder, or, as we should say, a certain Occupier of Land, who possesses among his other fields a vineyard. These vineyards required much careful cultivation. The ground was dug in the spring-time, and great pains were taken to keep it clear of weeds. Then, at the end of the summer, when the gathering

time came, many hands were needed to pick the grapes.

At one of these busy seasons, the Householder goes to the most likely place to find labourers, namely, into the market-place of the neighbouring village or town. He first goes out at daybreak, and engages some, promising to give them a penny for their day's labour, which is about eightpence of our money. And having agreed to his terms, they go into the vineyard. Finding he wants more labourers, he goes again at the third hour, that is, about nine o'clock, and hires more. In the afternoon he goes again; and still finds several unemployed. These too he sends into his vineyard. At length, when it only wants an hour of dusk, he makes a last visit to the market-place. And finding some even then not at work, he sends them to join the others, promising to give them whatever is right.

When the day closed, and evening set in, the owner called his steward, or bailiff, to him, and desired him to pay the labourers, beginning with those who had come last into the vineyard. To each man

the same payment was made. A penny was given to the last, as well as the first.

Now, this caused great discontentment among those who had been at work all the day. It seemed to them that the master had not acted fairly towards them, since they had worked longer for him than their brethren. They said, 'These have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.'

The Master, in reply, reminds them that he had promised them a certain sum, and *that* they had received. They had therefore nothing to complain of. And what, if he had given some *more* than their due? He had a right so to act; for the money was his own, and he had perfect liberty to bestow it as he pleased.

Now, it is rather difficult to see what is *the drift* of the Parable. But if we bear in mind St. Peter's question which he had asked—'What shall we have therefore?'—and also the remark that our Lord makes at the close of the Parable, we shall I think have the key that we want. For having

spoken the Parable, Jesus says, just as He had said before, 'So the last shall be first, and the first last;' and then He also adds, 'For many be called, but few chosen.'

Let us now consider these two Lessons, just as our Lord put them.

The last shall be first, and the first last—this is one lesson which the Parable teaches.

For instance, *the first in worldly rank* are often the very poorest according to God's estimate. Many a person who has been honoured here—who has been lifted up by station above the level of his fellow-men—or who has obtained a great name for his learning or for his valour—perhaps such an one may hereafter sink down into the lowest place, and even be altogether thrust out of God's kingdom.

Again, *the first in privileges and opportunities* may not stand so high in God's favour, as some who have had much fewer advantages. The man who has lived in a Christian land, for example, with gospel light shining all around him, may be con-

demned hereafter, whilst some poor Heathen who has only just heard of the Saviour's name, but has fled to Him as his hope, may be accepted. The one may have professed to be a worker in God's vineyard all his life: the other may have been till very lately shut out from it altogether.

Or, we might take two persons living in the same Christian country. One may have had the advantages of education. He may be the child of pious parents. He may have been long watched over by a faithful Minister. And yet he may not have profited by these great opportunities. Whilst another, with much less light, and much fewer blessings, may have found Christ, and earnestly followed Him.

There are some too, who are always *putting themselves first*—anxious to be noticed—desiring to take the lead—who have a good opinion of themselves, and wish others to have a good opinion of them—who, like the Pharisees, sound a trumpet before them. These will one day be thrown back into the shade, and be little esteemed by Him who looks into the heart; whilst, on the other hand, some meek, humble,

lowly one will be exalted. He may be unknown, and even dishonoured now; but he will be acknowledged before the angels of God. He may be content to take the lowest seat now; but it shall be said to him, 'Friend, come up higher.'

Once more. Do we not occasionally see persons, who have begun early to serve God, fairly *outstripped by others who were brought later into the Lord's service?* Like the labourers in the Parable, they entered the vineyard at the third hour; but perhaps they have grown dull and weary. Their faith has flagged; their love has cooled; and they are put to shame by some newly-awakened Christian, whose heart burns with a holier zeal. Of such it may be truly said, 'The last shall be first, and the first last.'

Still there is not one word in the Parable to encourage *delay*—not one word that would lead us to suppose that it matters little *when* we enter upon the Lord's service. The whole of Scripture teaches us far otherwise. Do we not again and again find a blessing resting on early piety? And are we not exhorted *now—at once*—to live a Christian life?

The Parable encourages us to enter *heartily* on our work, whenever God calls us to it, in the happy assurance that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord. And further, it seems to warn us that, although we may *seem* to be first, if we are not watchful, we may fall back into the hindmost rank; and also that we should never boast, or consider the battle over, till we have gained the victory, and put off our armour.

So much for the first Lesson which the Parable teaches, 'The last shall be first, and the first last.'

And now for the other lesson—*Many be called, but few chosen;* that is, there are many who are invited into the Lord's service, who are never accepted as His saved people.

The Jews, for instance, were *called* into God's kingdom. They were called by Moses and the Prophets, and afterwards by Christ Himself. But because they refused to receive Him, and to embrace His gospel, they were in the end rejected.

We too, who belong to the Christian

Church, have been all *called*. We were called to serve Christ at our Baptism. We were called again at our Confirmation. We are called every time the house of God is open. And has not God sent some of us *special* calls besides? Alas, it will be found at the great day that 'many' of us have been 'called,' but 'few chosen.'

Christ's true people are the *few*. They always have been the few out of the many, and they are so now. It will be of little use hereafter to be among the 'called.' It will be but a poor argument to say, 'Thou hast taught in our streets. We have heard of Thee every Sabbath. Thy name was familiar to us.' It will only add to our condemnation, and make our guilt tenfold greater, that the gospel was brought near to us; but we put it from us, and made light of it.

Such is the main teaching of the Parable. These are the two principal Lessons which, I think, our Lord wished us to learn from it. But there are three or four other things which may be noticed.

For instance, we may gather from the

Parable that God has a work for us *all* to do; and woe be unto us, if we pass through life without doing it!

Then, observe some of the men in the Parable saying, '*No man hath hired us.*' Now, there is not one of *us* who can say that. You and I shall have no such excuse to offer. God has taken us into His service. Nay, have we not pledged ourselves to serve Him faithfully? Oh, if we have neglected our Master's work, let us go back to it. There are only twelve short hours in our working day. Perhaps three, six, or even eleven of those precious hours may be gone for ever. The night is soon coming, when no man can work.

Further, we may observe that some of these Labourers, who were taken early into the Vineyard, *murmured because the same kindness was shown to their brethren who were hired later.* Beware of this feeling. Like 'a fly in the ointment,' it will spoil your work. There should be no grudging, no jealousy, among Christ's people. Are any honoured more than we? Be it so. At any rate we have more, far more, than we deserve. 'Let nothing be done

through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.'

Lastly, the Master said to his Labourers, 'Whatsoever is *right* I will give you.' And so God says to us. To one He gives health, and strength, and riches: to another, sickness, trials, and poverty. Be content; He gives what is *right*. Let us be thankful for what He *denies* us, as well as for what He *grants* us. Be assured, whatever comes is the *right* thing for us. And what matters it, if He withholds from us this or that earthly blessing, so long as He gives us His own dear Son, and salvation through Him?

May God give us thankful and contented hearts, convinced that we deserve nothing at His hands, and feeling that if we reach heaven at last, it will not be because we have *earned* it, but because God has given it to us of His free love and mercy.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

St. Luke, viii. 4–15.

When much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock, and as soon as it was sprung up it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred-fold. And when he had said these things he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe, and be saved. They on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

But that on the good ground are they which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

THIS is generally supposed to have been the first Parable which our Lord spoke. Let us see where Jesus was when He delivered it.

In the country of Galilee there was a large lake called Gennesaret, several miles across; and on this Lake many of our Lord's disciples earned their livelihood as fishermen. Jesus, having probably passed the night at Capernaum, which was by the water's side, went in the morning and sat by the Lake. Presently great multitudes flocked around Him. He desires to seize the favourable moment, and teach them something for their souls' good. To avoid the pressure of the crowd, He gets into one of the boats, and addresses the people from it.

Try and picture to yourself that scene. It is now probably the early spring. The Lake is calm and unruffled, and a number of little ships are dotted about upon its glassy surface. The Saviour is in one of them which is nearest to the shore. He suddenly stands up and speaks as never

man spake, with a heart full of tenderness and love for those whom He is addressing. Close by, along the bank, is ranged a group of eager listeners.

And what is the *subject* of His address? It seems oftentimes to have been our Lord's custom to take some familiar event, which was passing before His eyes at the time, and make it the groundwork of His instruction. Probably it was so in the present instance. Perhaps that very morning as He came to the Lake, His eye may have rested on some labourer, who was busily engaged in sowing his field. This at once supplies Him with a fit subject for His teaching, and He forthwith utters this beautiful Parable of the Sower. The object of it is to show that there is a right and a wrong way of hearing the Word of God.

In this Parable, as well as in that of the Wheat and the Tares, we have one great advantage; namely, that our Lord gives us His own explanation of it. For you will see, in the ninth and tenth verses, that when His disciples asked Him to tell them the meaning of the Parable, He re-

plied, 'Unto *you* it is given to learn the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to *others* in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.'

He meant by this that He was anxious that those who really desired to know His truth, and were willing to search into it, should be rewarded. But at the same time He wished that it should remain locked up and hidden from those who did not value it. And then He proceeds, in the eleventh and following verses, to give the explanation required.

But let us now go back to the Parable itself. Our Lord begins by saying, 'A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.'

We may suppose that the field here spoken of had a pathway, either through the middle of it, or by the hedge-side, just as we very often see in the present day. Some of the seed falls on this hard, beaten path; and there it lies on the surface. As

well might you expect it to spring up if dropped upon your room-floor, as to see it sink in, and grow, upon that trodden path. No; there it remains, till the fowls of the air come and fly off with it.

Now then let us see what explanation our Lord gives of this part of the Parable. We have it in the eighteenth and nineteenth verses; 'Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.'

The class of hearers here described we may call *Heedless Hearers*. And this is no uncommon class. Many go to the house of God without the slightest desire to profit by what is laid before them. The word spoken has not the least effect upon their hearts. It makes no impression whatever. They allow Satan to snatch it away, as soon as it falls.

This is sad to think of; but it is most true. What! has God sent us a message, and are there any who care not to receive

it? Does He tell us of our sins, and of a gracious Saviour who can deliver us from them? Does He speak to us of heaven and hell? And are these things nothing to us, not worth listening to? Alas! so it is with some. May it not be so with us?

But let us go on with the Parable, and see how it fared with other portions of the seed. 'Some fell upon *stony places*, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root they withered away.'

The 'stony places,' mentioned here, were probably certain patches in the field, where the soil was very bare. There was just a thin coating of mould, and the rock or stone beneath. Here the seed quickly springs up, and takes root; and all the quicker because there is no depth of soil to bury it. But almost immediately it dies away. The sun too, which greatly helps it in other parts of the field, is too much for it here.

We have again our Lord's own expla-

nation of the passage, in the twenty-first and twenty-second verses; 'He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the world, by-and-by he is offended.'

Now, this describes those whom we may call *Superficial and Unstable Hearers.*

There are some who *listen* attentively enough to the Word, whilst the Minister declares it, or whilst they themselves are reading it. There is no opposition to it, no cold rejection of God's message; but, on the contrary, a willing acceptance of it. The heart welcomes it; and it awakens a feeling of joy in the soul. It would seem that for the moment the heart is touched—that some impression is made—that God's converting, life-giving power is felt within. But alas, it is only the surface of the water that is ruffled. The arrow has only grazed the skin, and then glanced off again. The feelings are only roused for an instant; but the whole inner man remains much as it was before. A serious thought or two

comes across the mind; and presently all passes away.

Is it not so with many? Has it ever been so with you? There has perhaps been an inward joy when the Word was spoken. You felt for the moment as if sin was hateful to you, as if Christ was precious, and as if you could give your whole heart to God. Your soul was warmed within you. That was a blessed time; and oh that it had lasted! But it was not God's own work; and therefore it did not stand. It was not a tree of His gracious planting. It had no root. It withered away, having no real life within.

From this portion of the Parable we learn that there may be a strong feeling in a person; a whispering of the conscience; a starting up as of one awakened out of sleep. All this may take place, and yet there may be no conversion, no saving work of grace within, no deliberate turning of the heart to God, no blessed fruit showing itself in an altered life.

We may learn further that there is a *trying, sifting* time with most hearers. Just as the cutting winds, the nipping

frost, and the long scorching drought, all serve to try the tender blade of corn, whether it will endure only for *a while*, or whether it is *fairly* and *lastingly rooted;* even so the Christian has his trials too. Difficulties spring up. He once fancied that religion was an easy matter; but he now finds that the gate is strait, and the way narrow. Sin must be put away, and the heart weaned from many things which it used to love. Then too there is persecution to be borne; and it is hard to meet that. It is hard to be laughed at, and abused, and despised, for Christ's sake.

Depend upon it, it costs something to be a true Christian. It is not enough that there be the green *blade* of profession: there must be also the *root* of grace. There must be that within us, which will stand the trial, in whatever shape it comes.

Oh that God would give us more real earnestness and fixedness of heart!

The Parable further tells us that some of the seed 'fell among *thorns;* and the thorns sprung up, and choked it.'

Here was a better prospect of success

to the Sower. Here was some depth of soil. The blade made its appearance above ground, and the root laid firm hold below. But along with it sprang up weeds and thorns; and these grew so rank and strong, that they soon overpowered the good seed, and fairly killed it. You will observe that in the last case *the stones* spoilt *the root;* in this case *the thorns* spoil *the fruit.*

Our Saviour's explanation may be found in the twenty-second verse. It is this; 'He that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and (as St. Luke adds) the pleasures of this life, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.'

This is certainly a more promising class of Hearers than the last. We may call them *Tempted Hearers.* Their hearts are really impressed. They are thoroughly aroused. They go away with new and altered feelings, and honestly resolve to carry them out. They see the hatefulness of sin, and determine to forsake it. They see the beauty of holiness, and feel a taste for the joys of a religious life. But they have not counted the cost. They do not

consider that their poor feeble strength is but perfect weakness. They soon find that sundry temptations beset their course.

For instance, *the Cares of the world* press hard upon some. Take the case of a poor man or woman, who has perhaps a family to provide for, and who finds it hard to make his little incomings sufficient for his daily necessities. He gets behindhand. This brings cares and anxieties on his mind. He grows careless about his soul; and by degrees all his good resolutions are thrown aside. He drudges on, as if the wants of the body were his only concern. In this way the good seed is very often choked.

Or *Riches* are another person's temptation. We will take one whom God has blessed with enough and to spare. He is well to do in the world. He is a thriving man. His business prospers. He is tempted to set his heart on money. It steals away his affections from better things. It becomes the 'one thing needful' with him, the all-important object in life; and presently God is completely thrust out and forgotten. No wonder that our Lord says,

'How hardly shall they that have *riches* enter the kingdom of heaven.' No wonder that the young Ruler 'went away sorrowful;' for we are told that 'he had *great possessions.*'

Or again, the world has *Pleasures* also, suited to tempt and entice the heart. Men love these pleasures, and live for them, though perhaps all the while they feel their thorough emptiness. And thus these pleasures, poor as they are, are constantly dragging the heart downwards. God's Word is heard and believed. There is a power in it, which brings conviction to the conscience. But then the world's demands interfere with it.

Then comes the struggle. And oh, what a hard struggle it is! Every now and then the question arises, Shall I give up the world with all its charms, or shall I give up my Saviour? There is a strong desire at times to serve Christ, and yet an unwillingness to leave all and follow Him. Yes, *all;* for all must be given up; at least, we must be *ready* to part with everything, even what is most dear to us, *if He should demand it of us.* And do not many

stumble at this stumbling-stone, turn back, and go no more with Christ? Here again the good seed is choked and rendered unfruitful—choked by worldly *pleasures.*

Now whatever earthly feeling has at this moment possession of our hearts—whether it be the *Cares* of the world, or the *Riches* of the world, or the *Pleasures* of the world—it must be put away, and that speedily, or the salvation of our soul is imperilled. Do not mistake me. It is possible to occupy ourselves with the ordinary callings and duties of this world, and yet all the while to be doing God's work, and that faithfully. We may be rich too, and yet not set our heart on riches; our treasure may be in heaven. Let us only take care that no earthly thing is allowed to engross and fill our minds, or it will be quite sure to thrust out better things, and destroy the work of grace.

Once more the Parable tells us that other seed 'fell upon *good ground*, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold.'

Here we have the *genuine, earnest, be-*

lieving Hearer. This part of the Parable speaks so plainly, that there is no mistaking it. Still our Lord condescends to give us an explanation of it in the twenty-third verse; 'He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.' To this I need add nothing, except it be to say, Blessed are they who thus 'hear the word of God, and keep it!'

There is one thing specially to be observed in this Parable. It is that *three* unprofitable kinds of Hearing are described, and *only one* who hears with any saving effect. On a large number of Hearers God's word is thrown away. Their hearts are not in a state to receive it, and be blest by it. Few only bring forth fruit unto life eternal.

Let me now put a few things before you, which this Parable clearly teaches.

1st. It teaches that *our hearts must be prepared by God* to receive the good seed

of His truth. Do you not prepare *the Field*, before the Sower comes to scatter the grain over it? What if you should only run the plough through it here and there, and leave patches of it hard and unbroken? Could you expect an even crop? Certainly not. Then why act differently with your own heart? Ask God to make your heart soft, and to remove your blindness, your impenitence, your unbelief. The next time you sit down to read your Bible at home, or hear it in church, entreat God to prepare your heart, and to enable you to receive with meekness His engrafted Word. Do this, and you will soon find the blessed effects of it.

2ndly. We may learn that in order to hear profitably, *something more is needed than mere attention.* A person may sit and listen very quietly; and yet carry nothing away with him. I will go even further and say, a person may remember every word of a sermon, so as to be able to talk about it; and yet he may be but a 'wayside' hearer after all. The ears may have been open, and yet the heart closed.

The sinner may remain a sinner still. The understanding may be fed, but the heart empty. We may be able to *talk* about a sermon, and yet feel no desire to *act* upon it.

O God, speak to my heart; that is what I want. Speak Thou Thyself to my inner conscience. Shoot Thou the arrow; and may it pierce and wound my soul!

3rdly. *Beware of becoming hardened.* Sometimes we see young men and women, —ay, and old people too, with very hard hearts. Nothing seems to move them. They have no feeling. Their consciences are numbed and callous. What a fearful state to be in! Better any state than this! Better to be alarmed, and anxious, and even miserable, than to be, as St. Paul says, '*past feeling!*'

Remember, *Sin* hardens the heart. *Worldliness* hardens it. And even *the Gospel* itself hardens it, when it is often heard, but not heeded. This is the worst hardness of all, when any one is 'ever hearing,' and yet 'never comes to the knowledge of the truth.'

4thly. We are reminded in this Parable that there is an *Evil Spirit* ever hovering about us. 'Then cometh *the wicked one*,' says our Lord. And *where* does he come? Everywhere he comes; and especially wherever 'the good seed' is being sown, wherever the word of God is preached. He enters the very house of God. He is one of the first who comes, and one of the last who goes. When any word, that suits the state of a sinner, falls from the mouth of the Preacher, then comes the wicked one, eager to catch it away. When we pray in our secret chamber, he is sure to be there, trying to dart into our minds the most trifling thoughts. When we read our Bibles, he tries to draw off our attention, and to darken the light of God's truth, as it glimmers upon our souls. When we are upon our knees in God's house, he is by our side, and whispers to us about the world, and even about sin. And especially when the great message of salvation is proclaimed, he steels our hearts against it, and uses all the means he can to make it fall powerless on our ears.

Be on the watch, then. There is in the

gospel a precious treasure. Seize hold of it while it is offered to you, and make it yours. Take care that no one snatches it from you.

May the Lord, who spoke this Parable of the Sower, make it a warning and a blessing to our souls!

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

ST. LUKE, XVIII. 31–43.

Then Jesus took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death; and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. And it came to pass that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side begging: and hearing a multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him; and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

OUR Lord saw fit occasionally to warn His disciples of what was before Him. Some-

times He gave them mere hints as to the sufferings that awaited Him. Here however He speaks very plainly and openly.

He was now going to Jerusalem, for the last time, to partake of the Feast of the Passover. Numbers were on the road, who were also going to the Feast. Our Lord suddenly takes His Twelve Disciples apart, and makes this solemn announcement to them; 'Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on; and they shall scourge him, and put him to death; and the third day he shall rise again.'

He speaks to them of the ill-treatment He should receive, of His approaching death, and of His Resurrection. These were startling facts to place before them; and yet it appears they made but little impression; for we read that 'they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things that were spoken.'

It is very remarkable that even our Lord's chosen Apostles could not take in the idea of His suffering for them. It was hid from them. It seemed so contrary to all their prejudices and expectations, that they could not receive it. They had read the Scriptures ; but they could not see how they could be accomplished in the disgrace and death of the Redeemer. They were so intent upon those prophecies that spoke of His glory, that they overlooked those which foretold His sufferings. So much was this the case, that a few months after these words were spoken, when He was seized by His enemies, tried, and put to death, they were quite taken by surprise, and all, excepting one, forsook Him and fled. And then too, on the third day, when He rose again from the dead, it was long before they could be persuaded that such was really the case. They still looked for Him in the tomb, and for a while refused to believe the news that was brought to them. No wonder that our Lord, when He remembered how plainly and how often He had spoken to His disciples of His approaching death ; and how plainly too His sufferings were fore-

told in the Old Testament Scriptures—no wonder that He exclaimed, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not (were you not led to expect)—ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?'

When our Lord had made the announcement we have been speaking of to His disciples privately, He again joins the crowd, and proceeds with them on the road to Jerusalem — that very Jerusalem where He knew that He was to suffer. On their way thither they pass through the town of Jericho. And on the outskirts of the town, there sits a Beggar by the roadside, a poor, blind man, who perhaps had been in the habit of taking his place there day after day, and telling his piteous tale to travellers as they passed.

Hearing the sound of many voices, he inquired what the crowd might be. He is told that Jesus is passing by, and a number of others with Him. The name of Jesus seems to have been a welcome name to him. He had probably heard of His healing power, and of His unbounded

mercy. This and that person had been cured by Him; and why should not he? Instantly he makes his application, for he feels that no time is to be lost. He cries out, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' The thoughtless multitude try to stop the petitioner. They heed not his great affliction, and wish to stifle his clamour. But this only made him press his claim the more earnestly. Like some pent-up stream, which, when checked, only swells the more, and rises the higher; so is it with true prayer. It *will* speak. It *will* be heard. And such too was the case with this poor blind man: he cries all the louder, 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' Ah, he felt his want, as no one could feel it who had not himself suffered. And he felt that here was an opportunity to be seized, such as he might never have again.

How miserably poor are our cries compared with his! And why is it that our prayers are so languid and our requests so feebly offered? Is it not because we fancy that we are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not

that we are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked? This is why we apply to God with so little earnestness. And is there not another reason also? We too often doubt if Jesus is able and willing to give us all we need—that He can in one moment enlighten us in our blindness, and enrich us in our poverty. We have not, because we ask not. We ask, and receive not, because we ask amiss.

Oh for more earnest, hearty, persevering prayer; such prayer as we read of, both at the beginning and end of this chapter—in the beginning of it, where we are told of a helpless widow pleading her cause with earnestness before an unjust judge—and at the end of our chapter, where we have the story, on which we are now dwelling.

The multitude attempted to close the blind man's lips; and perhaps some will try to close ours, telling us that such earnestness is not necessary. Heed them not; but cry all the more vehemently, and never cease till your petition is granted.

It has been said that if we would pray well, we must have something to pray for, something that we really crave. We must

know our wants, *feel* our wants, *express* our wants. We must have an errand at the throne. A Christian man was once asked the secret of his fervour in prayer. 'Oh,' said he, 'I have always an errand at the Throne: and then I tell my Lord what I come for, and wait for an answer.' And so too must *we* pray, and look in humble faith for an answer to our prayers.

Suppose that Bartimeus (for St. Mark tells us that this was the poor man's name) —suppose that blind Bartimeus, after kneeling in the dust, and raising his bitter cry, 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on me,' had then turned away from Christ, saying, 'Now that I have made my prayer, I will go back to my trade, and see what money I can get from this crowd of people.' And so, rising from his knees, he had gone begging from one to another. Would he not have deserved that the insulted Saviour should have rejected his prayer, and sealed his blindness to him for ever? And yet do not we often act much like this? After putting up our prayer, we forget what we have been doing, and go wandering after some earthly gain or

pleasure. We do not look for an answer, and wait for its coming. The Archer, when he pulls his bow, follows the arrow with his eye, till he sees it strike; but how many of us never cast a second glance after the petition which has left our lips! We look upon prayer as a thing done, instead of feeling that it is something which is to call down a blessing from above.

But to return. Our Lord stops; for the prayer of the beggar has reached His ear. He desires him to be brought near to Him. And then He questions him as to the exact nature of his petition. If he was going to ask for silver or gold, Jesus would have had none to give him. But he wants something more than this. No sum of money could make up to him for his loss of sight. He longs to have that restored. And so he begs, 'Lord, that I may receive my sight.'

Did Jesus need to be informed what the blind man desired? Could He be ignorant of what was going on in his heart? Was He not aware of every thought, every feeling, every longing within him? Certainly

he was; but He would have him tell them all out to Him. And so it is with us now. He knows our every want; but He will know them *from us.* 'Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of to do it for them.'

His request was no sooner made than granted. 'Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight.'

There is something very comforting in such a miracle as this. It shows what Jesus *could do* when he was upon earth, and what He therefore *can do* now. He can open our blind eyes, and relieve all the distresses of our souls. He is willing to receive every one who comes to Him. His language to us is, 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.'

Let this encourage us to ask for His enlightening grace. Let us entreat Him to give us spiritual sight. And when we come to that short Prayer in our Evening

Service, in which we pray for the light of day, let us remember that, glorious as that light is, there is a better light still—the spiritual light that shines into the soul. Let us have this in our thoughts when next we say, 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord.' 'Open thou our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law.'

One more thing is told us, which we must not overlook. Jesus, who had so willingly stopped at the Beggar's call, has no longer any cause to tarry in the neighbourhood of Jericho. His work there is finished; but a mightier work urges Him on. He therefore proceeds on His way to Jerusalem. But what is to become of the poor man who has been made so happy? Must he stay behind? Must he bid his Deliverer farewell, and return to his seat by the wayside? No, he cannot do this. He cannot part with one who had been so great a blessing to him. We are told, in the closing verse, that he 'followed Jesus, glorifying God.' It may be that from that hour he became one of His true disciples;

for his heart was filled with gratitude, and his mouth with praise.

It is further added, that 'all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.' No one in that crowd had so much reason to rejoice as he had; and yet not he only, but one and all lifted up their hearts with thankfulness to God for this display of His power and love. The rejoicing of that one man made the whole multitude rejoice. They took up his joyful keynote and joined in a loud chorus of praise. That road to Jerusalem became for the moment almost a heaven upon earth. Jesus for a while received the honour due to Him; for nothing is more acceptable to Him than the sacrifice of grateful hearts and joyful lips.

A thankful spirit is seldom confined to oneself: it is almost sure to produce thankfulness in others. May God then 'put a new song in our mouth, even a thanksgiving unto our God!' And then those about us will catch the joyous strain, and add their songs of praise to ours.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

ST. MATT. VI. 16–21.

When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

ASH-WEDNESDAY is the first day of Lent; and this is a season when our Church calls upon us to humble ourselves before God, and to seek Him with contrite hearts, and with renewed zeal. It is a most solemn time; a time for special self-exa-

mination, heart-searching, and self-denial; a time for buckling on afresh our Christian armour, and stirring up ourselves to greater earnestness and a closer walk with God.

The portion of Scripture which is appointed for to-day's Gospel is part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. In the beginning of the chapter He gives us some directions about *Almsgiving;* and cautions us, in doing works of charity, not to seek the mere praise and favour of men. Then He goes on to *Prayer;* and warns us against praying merely to be noticed by our fellow-men. And having dwelt a while on this subject, He passes on to another matter, and speaks about *Fasting.* And here again He utters a caution, lest we should do it for the sake of appearance, and not from a right motive; 'Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward.'

These 'hypocrites,' whom our Lord

speaks of, were no doubt Pharisees, about whom there was more of parade and outer show than of real holiness. Their almsgivings, their prayers, and also their fastings, were chiefly for appearance, that they might earn a character for sanctity among their brethren, and be admired as patterns of goodness.

Now, our Lord says to His own disciples, Beware of doing as these men do; for, verily, I say unto you they have their reward. They are anxious for the praise of men, and they gain it: but while they have this very poor recompense, their heavenly Father condemns them. Men may not see through the thin veil, but God in an instant detects their hypocrisy.

'But,' Jesus adds, 'thou, *when* thou fastest.' He does not say, Since these men make such a mockery of fasting, it is therefore better not to fast at all. But no; He bids us avoid their error, and let ours be a *true* fast. 'But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret;

and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.'

That is to say, Let all be done as between you and God. Instead of putting on a mournful appearance to attract attention, let your dress and your countenance be as usual. Anoint thy head, and wash thy face, as at other times, that thou appear not unto men to fast. Put *man* out of the question, and think only of *yourself* and *God.*

Now the subject of Fasting is one about which there is some difficulty. And yet I do not like altogether to pass it by.

To fast means to abstain from food, or to deny ourselves as to the quantity or quality of the food which we take.

Fasting is often spoken of in the Old Testament. The Jews had four stated fast days in the year. And besides these, they had also a number of occasional fasts. It was customary with the Pharisees to fast twice in the week. We read in Scripture of public fasts being held during times of great calamity. Thus we are told of King Jehosaphat proclaiming a fast throughout

Judea, and of Ezra doing the same, and also the King of Nineveh. We find the Prophet Joel bidding the people to 'sanctify a fast, and call a solemn assembly.' And following their example, we have had public fasts in *our own country*, when any great trouble has come upon us.

But is this according to the teaching of the *New* Testament? Is fasting spoken of there? Certainly it is. Our Lord Himself fasted in the wilderness before He entered upon His ministry. And He seems to take it for granted that His disciples will fast also; for He says in our text, 'And thou, when thou fastest.' Speaking too of the time when He should no longer be with them, He says, 'The days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.' On another occasion, when His disciples were unable to cast out an evil spirit, He tells them, 'Howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.' We read of Anna, that she 'served God with fastings and prayers night and day.' Then, in the Acts of the Apostles, we find the disciples fasting, when they were going to choose and send forth

ministers to preach the gospel. And St. Paul speaks to the Corinthians of 'giving themselves to fasting and prayer.'

There can be no doubt then that fasting is a duty enjoined both in the Old and New Testaments, and one that our Lord Himself observed.

Our Church therefore follows up the teaching of Holy Scripture, and invites us to mix fasting with our prayers. And why so? Is there any merit in fasting? Can we earn heaven by it? No; a person may fast all his life, and yet be none the nearer to God, unless he loves his Saviour, and finds acceptance through Him.

What then is the good of fasting? It is very good for us to deny ourselves. It is a wholesome discipline for our souls. It is a means of curbing our evil wills, and mortifying our corrupt affections. It is a means too of humbling ourselves before God. And if we use it rightly, it may bring a great blessing to our souls.

Lent is a time when our Church especially recommends us to fast, in order to help us to come with humbled hearts before

God, to pray with increased earnestness, and to take up our cross and follow Christ. But I always feel a difficulty in speaking to those who are poor about fasting; for every day is a sort of fast with them, and every day they come short of what their richer brethren enjoy. *Their* fast then should be some act of self-denial, not perhaps as regards food, but as regards some other enjoyment. And there are many ways, brethren, in which we all can give up something, if we will, for the Lord's sake.

Those who are weakly too can hardly fast; for they would soon find their health suffering from it. But they also may mortify their carnal desires in some other way.

Certainly we find, in reading the lives of good men, both in former times and in our own days, that those who have lived nearest to God have made a practice of setting apart special days and seasons for prayer and fasting. And by these means they have grown in grace and in the knowledge of Christ their Lord.

And now I have set the matter before

you, leaving it entirely to your own judgment to act upon it or not, as you may see to be right in the sight of God. But at the same time I should be wrong if I did not say, that many Christians have found fasting very helpful to their souls—not fasting for mere form's sake—not eating fish instead of meat, and thus denying themselves in one thing, and indulging themselves in another, which they like quite as well—but giving up this or that thing, which they really care for, and as our Collect says, 'using such abstinence, that our flesh may be subdued to the spirit.' Thus may we gain the mastery over our desires and appetites, keeping under our wills, and bringing them into subjection.

One thing is most clear from the passage of Scripture before us, that to do this or any other Christian act, merely to establish a character before men, is hateful in God's sight. If we fast, let us do it not to attract attention, but as expressing a deep feeling of sorrow for sin; and let it be accompanied by earnest prayer to God.

But let us now go back to the verses

before us. Having spoken of fasting, our Lord goes on to urge us to lay up our treasure above, and not here below; 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.'

What are the 'treasures' He is here speaking of? All our hopes, all our best and truest grounds of happiness, all the ends for which we toil and labour now—these are our chief treasures. The man who is rich, and thinks only of his riches; who lives for this world's enjoyments, and seeks his rest in them; he is laying up his treasure on earth. He too who follows his trade, or his profession, or any earthly pursuit with so much eagerness that every thing gives place to it; who rises up early and late takes rest, but has no time for better things; he again is laying up his treasure upon earth.

The poor man also, who cares only to get a living; whose chief anxiety is to procure for himself food and raiment; who works hard for the body, but neglects the soul; he too is laying up his little treasure upon earth.

But on the other hand, if God has made us feel that we have souls to be saved; if Christ and His salvation are dearer to us than all else; if we are ever acting with eternity in view; if we are living for another world; then are we laying up our treasure in heaven. In the one case we labour 'for the meat that perisheth:' in the other, 'for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.'

And which is the wisest course? If we succeed in gaining our earthly prize, it can be ours only for a time; it can last but a few short years: and then it will be taken from us. It was so with the Fool in the parable. His ground brought forth plentifully; and he forthwith built more barns to stow away all his fruits and his goods; saying to himself, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years.' But he was mistaken; for that very night his soul was required of him, and his treasure gone.

And so it is with *every* treasure that is but earthly. It cometh up, and is cut down like a flower. It withers and decays like the leaves in autumn. The rust eats

into it, and the moth frets and destroys it. The thief breaks in, and snatches it from us. And all our goodliest treasure, on which we have spent so much toil and pains, takes to itself wings, and flies away from us when we most need it.

Is not this true? Where are our fondest hopes? Where are those laid-up treasures, from which we expected so much enjoyment? They have perished one after another, before our very eyes. And if we were to die to-day, we should be just as poor as regards this world, as we were when we came into it.

Lay not up then for yourselves treasures upon earth; for they will only disappoint you. Money, lands, pleasures, food and raiment, are but poor things to spend our lives in seeking after. Surely there is something better to care for, something that will repay us, something that will last, something that has the stamp of God upon it. Christ would not *deprive* us of our treasure; but He directs us in our *choice* of it. 'Lay up for yourselves (He says) treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt,

and where thieves do not break through nor steal.'

Mary did this when she sat at Jesus' feet, and listened to His words. She was laying up a treasure in the heavens that faileth not. 'Martha, Martha, (said our Lord) thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.'

St. Paul too laid up his treasure in heaven, when he spent his time, his strength, his energies, in seeking to win souls; so that when he drew near his end, he could say, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; and now there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.'

And so it is I trust with some of us. There are some in the present day whose eyes are steadily turned towards heaven, and who are saying to themselves, 'It shall be my great aim to reach that blessed place. The way is open to me. The path is clearly marked out, and I will walk in it. This one thing I will do; forgetting those things that are behind,

and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I will press towards the mark. However it may be with others, my treasure shall be in heaven.'

Our Lord here adds, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' Never were truer words. Our hearts and affections are sure to be fixed on our treasure, whatever it be. If we are hoarding up riches, our heart will be wrapped up in them. A money-making man once said to me, 'It is of no use my coming to church; for when there my mind is for ever dwelling on my gains and hopes.' Oh there was something true, but very sad, in that acknowledgment. If we are living for pleasure, our hearts will be continually roving after some new enjoyment. Or if we allow our earthly business, whatever it is, to take up all our time, our hearts will be in our farm and our merchandise, even when we are in God's presence.

And so too, if our treasure is in *heaven*, our desires, our aims, our hopes, our feelings, will all be heavenly; for 'where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also.'

Happy those who have only a heart

for Christ, and who have only Christ in their heart. He is our truest possession, our richest treasure. He is the pearl of great price. Let us be willing to sell all that we have to win Him. Let the prayer of each one of us be, 'O Lord, may my heart rest satisfied in Thee alone; since it was made for Thee, and since Thou alone art worthy of it.'

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

St. Matt. iv. 1–11.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

The season of Lent is a time when we ought to think much on the subject of sin;

of its hatefulness in God's sight; of the misery which it brings with it; and how we may best resist it. And as Jesus was our great example in all things, our Church, on this First Sunday in Lent, holds Him up to us as our pattern in resisting temptation.

It has been observed that there are three great temptations mentioned in the Bible.

The *first* was at the very beginning of the world, when the devil made a deliberate attack on our first parents. The *second* was when he obtained special permission to try the faith of Job, first by afflicting him in his family, and then by the most dreadful bodily suffering. The *third* was when he assailed our Lord in the wilderness.

In the first of these temptations Satan *succeeded*. Adam and Eve fell. In the second he *partly* succeeded; for Job was shaken in his integrity, and in a measure gave way to impatience. In the third he *utterly failed;* for our Lord came out of it stainless and unharmed.

It is with this last temptation that we have now to do.

Our Saviour was just entering upon His ministry when the Evil One assailed Him. St. Matthew tells us that He 'was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.' The Holy Spirit inclined Him to go there, that He might be alone, far away from the haunts of men, and thus undergo the tremendous trial.

Satan made three separate attempts to induce our Lord to commit sin. He began by taking advantage of His having fasted for forty days. He was now an hungred. And the tempter came to Him, and proposed a way by which He might in one instant find relief. He well knew that Christ had the power to work any miracle that He pleased; and so he suggests that He should use that power. 'If Thou be the Son of God.' You profess to be His beloved Son; if then you are so indeed, show it by doing what I now propose—'Command that these stones be made bread.'

And why should not our Lord have done this? Because, if He had yielded, it would have shown, not His power, but His weakness. And also it would have spoilt the bright example He was setting us of

self-denial and endurance. Therefore He at once refused, saying, 'It is written (referring to a passage in the Book of Deuteronomy), man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' The feeding of the body is not the one thing needful, but the keeping of the word or commandment of God.

Having been thus baffled, the devil tries another form of temptation. He takes Him into Jerusalem, the holy city; persuades Him to place Himself in some lofty part of the temple; and then says to Him, 'If Thou be the Son of God,' (he puts it again on His claiming sonship with God), 'cast Thyself down.'

It is supposed by some that the part of the temple, where Jesus was now standing, was what was called 'The King's Gallery.' This overlooked the valley below. And here (as an old Jewish writer tells us) 'King Herod erected a gallery of a vast height, from the top of which, if any one looked down, he would grow dizzy, his eyes not being able to reach so vast a depth.'

From this great height Satan tries to persuade our Lord to cast Himself down. And he reminds Him of a gracious promise in the ninety-first Psalm, 'For it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands he shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.'

There was something very artful in quoting this promise. It seemed at first sight exactly to bear upon the case. But he could not deceive our Lord. How, I ask, would it be in your own case? Would it be a proof of trust, if you or I were standing on a high tower, and we were to cast ourselves down, saying, 'God has promised to protect me?' Surely not. It would be an insult to God, and a daring act of presumption. So Jesus regarded it; and therefore He replied by appealing a second time to Scripture, 'It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'

The devil now makes another attempt to lead Jesus from the path of uprightness. He takes Him up into an exceeding high mountain; and from the top of it shows

Him at a glance 'all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.' And then he makes this deliberate offer, 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.'

This was indeed a tempting proposal, and one that seemed to fall in with those words in the second Psalm, where the Lord says, 'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.' And now Satan offers to put Him in immediate possession of all this. But our Lord saw the emptiness of his proposal. He knew that it was one of Satan's lies, and that he had no power to bestow such a gift, though he so readily promised it. And besides, the Saviour came to *purchase* the lost world, by His own life-blood, and not to receive it as *a gift*. How shameful too were the terms proposed, 'If Thou wilt fall down and worship me!' The very idea must have been most painful to the Saviour's mind. How could He, the Holy One of God, cringe before

the Evil One, pay him reverence, and even worship him? At once therefore He indignantly rejects the proposal, saying, 'Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'

And now, having failed in each attempt to entrap our Lord, he leaves Him in the wilderness. He leaves Him there alone, and yet not alone, for we are told that 'angels came and ministered unto him.' This means that they comforted and helped Him, and supplied Him with the food He so much needed.

There may be difficulties connected with this account of our Lord's temptation. For instance, it is difficult to imagine how at Satan's bidding He should have mounted up to a 'pinnacle of the temple.' Again, we are ready to ask, How could He have seen from any mountain 'all the kingdoms of the world,' or even all the kingdoms of Palestine? It is thought by some that He was in a kind of trance, and that the whole world appeared to be spread out before Him.

Be this as it may; what most concerns *us* is very clear and plain; namely, that our Lord was actually tempted by that Evil Spirit, who is called Satan or the Devil, and that He successfully resisted him. And here we have a most blessed pattern, showing us how we may resist him also.

Let us see what we may learn from the occurrence.

1st, We may learn that *Temptation is a real thing.* That the Son of God was actually tempted by an evil spirit, there can be no doubt. And that same spirit is our enemy, and actually tempts us, and tries to lead us into sin. He tempted Adam, as we have seen, in the Garden of Eden. He tempted David to number Israel. He entered into Judas Iscariot, and led him to betray our Lord. And St. Peter bids us be on our guard, 'because (he says) your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.'

Never despise temptation; but dread it, as what may bring you into much misery. Ask God to keep it away from you; or if

it comes, to shield and protect you. Pray earnestly, 'Lead us not into temptation.' And carefully avoid putting yourself in the way of it. Avoid the persons, the places, the occasions, that may lead to it.

2ndly. We may learn from this passage of Scripture that *Satan knows all our circumstances*, and will attack us accordingly. He knew that Jesus had been fasting, so he tempts Him to turn stones into bread. He knew that He was trustful, so He tries to make Him presume upon His heavenly Father's care. He knew that He was come to win back the world, and so he offers at once to put Him in possession of it.

And in like manner will he deal with us. Are we in trouble? he will tempt us to despair. Are we prospering? he will endeavour to make us boastful and self-confident. Are we specially weak in any one point? there he will direct his attack. If we are careless and asleep as regards our souls, he will not disturb us; but if we are awakened and in earnest, then he will make us afraid of what this or that person may think of us; he will stir up a

feeling of shame within us ; and he will do all he can to keep us from Christ. Depend upon it, he knows all our weaknesses, and will take advantage of them.

3rdly. We may gather from this account that *the holiest persons are not free from temptation.* Even the holy Saviour was assailed by Satan ; who then is safe ?

And yet here is something to comfort us. It is clear that sin lies, not in being tempted, but in giving way to temptation ; not in being assaulted by Satan, but in yielding to him. If we admit the tempter into our hearts ; if we willingly give room to him even for a time ; if we feel that temptation is pleasant to us ; and so throw ourselves in the way of it ; then it becomes sinful, and our souls are in danger. But if we hate it, and resist it, then we are doing what is right, and God is well pleased.

4thly. We shall be *safe if we act as Jesus did.* He resisted the first onset of evil. He thrust the tempter from Him. And so should we. The very thought of sin was hateful to Him. His righteous soul

abhorred evil. He shrank from its very touch. And so it will be with us, if we are like our Lord. When we are tempted to do what is wrong, though the world may wink at it, and speak lightly of it, let *our* language be, 'How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?'

But you will say perhaps, 'There is a difference between us and Christ. He was strong, and we are weak.' True; but clad in 'the armour of God,' we too may be strong, and thus we may 'withstand all the fiery darts of the devil.' If we resist in our own strength, we shall be sure to fail; but if we resist in Christ's strength, there is certain victory for us. He cannot touch us, if Jesus casts His shield around us.

Lastly, *the presence of Angels* at our Lord's temptation should *encourage us.* They came, we are told, 'and ministered unto Him.' On another occasion, when the Saviour was enduring His bitter agony in the garden of Gethsemane, we read that 'there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.' And *we* may reckon on the same help, when we need it.

For what is the employment of Angels? 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?' Often in our hours of weakness they have perhaps strengthened us. We know not *how* they help us, but God employs them for that very purpose. 'The angel of the Lord (says the Psalmist) encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.'

Let us go forth strong for the conflict, strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. And as we fight the good fight of faith, let us think of Jesus and His glorious victory. Let His example cheer us, and His grace support us. So shall we be 'more than conquerors through Him who loved us.'

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

ST. MATT. xv. 21–28.

Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

JESUS was now in the district of Tyre and Sidon. These two cities were on the sea-coast, on the north-west side of Galilee. Our Lord had gone there that He might find a little retirement, and be hidden for a time from the gaze of men. Whilst in that

neighbourhood, a person comes to Him, who is described as a Woman of Canaan; belonging, that is, to some family of those ancient Canaanites who formerly possessed the land. St. Mark calls her 'a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation.' She was therefore a Gentile, or heathen, and probably spoke the Greek language.

She comes to Him in great trouble, and evidently feeling that He alone could give her relief. She had a young daughter, whom she had left at home in a very sad state, for she was possessed by an evil spirit. She was an anxious mother, and dearly loved her child. And hearing of the Saviour's wonder-working power, she comes to Him in her distress. She appeals to His compassion, and implores Him to bestow upon her that mercy which He had so often shown to others. Her first words are, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David.' She then tells Him of her sad errand, and makes known to Him the miserable condition in which she had left her child.

Our Lord is silent. 'He answers her not a word.' His *lips* are closed, and

perhaps His *ear* too, against her petition. Here was the first trial of her faith; the first shock to her feelings; the first check to her earnestness. Not a word came from those holy lips, not a word of kindness, or of encouragement, or even of sympathy and feeling.

And now the disciples interfere. But why so? Was it because they felt for her? Was it because they threw themselves into her case? No; it was because her importunity annoyed them, and they therefore wished her to be relieved at once and sent away. Just as people sometimes throw money to a persevering beggar, not so much from a feeling of charity, as because they wish to get rid of him. So, too, on another occasion, when some parents brought their little children to our Lord, the disciples rebuked those who brought them. And now, in the case before us, they beseech Him to send the woman away, for her cries were unwelcome to them.

Upon this Jesus gives a reason why He had not granted her request; 'I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the

house of Israel.' My mission of mercy is specially to the Jews. They are the lost sheep that I am come to save. But here is a stranger, a foreigner, a heathen—one who has no claim whatever upon Me—one who has no right to be heard.

But even this is not enough to discourage her. It only makes her more earnest and more lowly in her supplication. She kneels before the Saviour. She knocks as a beggar at the door of His mercy. She falls low at His feet, and simply exclaims, with a heart bursting with grief, 'Lord, help me!' I am oppressed; undertake for me. My trouble is great, relieve me; ease me of my load, for it presseth me sore.

Still Jesus utters the language of discouragement. Ay, and more than discouragement; for there is something like reproach in His words. He still speaks to her as an outcast. 'It is not meet (or right) to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs.'

This was enough, one would have thought, to make her give up all as hopeless. But nothing could stop her. No seeming coldness on the Saviour's part, no

words of apparent sharpness that fell from His lips, could quench the burning flame that was kindled within her. Ah, it is true she was but a poor heathen; not within the fold, but as yet afar off; an 'alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise;' having no claim upon the Saviour's mercy, and no place among the children. And yet, did He not come to save the lost, and to heal the broken-hearted? He had spoken of 'the children's bread.' Be it so, let the best food be given to the children; but still is there not a morsel for the dogs, for such unworthy ones as herself? 'Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table.' I desire not those rich blessings which are provided for the more highly favoured: I ask only for what they leave.

Thus is she willing to take the lowest place, and to put herself at the Saviour's feet, stript of every plea but the plea of her wretchedness.

And now Jesus turns to her with a changed look, and with altered words. Like Joseph, when he made himself known

to his brethren, so the Saviour comes forth now in His true character, full of tenderness and affection. And with a heart that had been all the while yearning over this poor suppliant, He exclaims, 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' He expresses strong approval of her faith, and assures her that her dearest wishes are already granted. He could deny her nothing: let her take what she came for. St. Matthew adds, 'And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.'

Now the question which naturally rises in our minds is this; Why did Jesus appear so indifferent to the entreaties of this poor woman? He received her petition first with perfect silence, not answering her a word. Then He gave her a positive refusal, telling her that He was not sent to such as her, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And then, further, He declared, that if He bestowed a blessing upon her, it would be like casting bread to the dogs.

Why was all this? Was it that our

Lord had lost His compassion? Had He forgotten to be gracious? Had He in anger shut up His tender mercies? No; His character never changes; He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It is clear that He was determined from the first to try the faith of this Canaanite; knowing that it would come forth 'as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.' And so does Jesus try our faith now. He may seem at times not to heed us, when all the while He knows our misery, and has perhaps a purpose of mercy and love towards us.

We see in this Woman an example of earnest, and yet humble faith. She believed that Christ had a gift to bestow, and she was anxious, yea determined, to obtain it. Nothing seemed to check her. She felt persuaded that there was abundant compassion in the heart of Jesus, and she was resolved to call it out. She would not let Him go except He blest her.

Her faith was like a powerful river, which flows on in spite of every impediment. Nay, the more obstacles we place in its way, the more we try to close in its

banks, the deeper is the stream, and the stronger its course, till at length it sweeps away every obstruction, and flows on at full liberty.

Great was this woman's faith. But greater still was God's mercy; for her great faith was His gift. Faith is the foundation of the whole Christian building; but the foundation, as well as the building, is the work of God.

The *faith* only of this woman of Canaan is mentioned. But there were other graces which shone brightly in her conduct — humility, meekness, patience, perseverance in prayer. But faith was the parent, and these were the fruits which grew upon the tree.

Oh, that we had more of her faith; faith to believe; faith to cling to the Saviour; faith to pray and pray on, even though we may get no immediate answer to our prayers; faith to rest all on Christ, and to put ourselves unreservedly in His hands!

The case before us is very encouraging. It shows us that Christ is near, when we may fancy that He turns away from us;

that He hears us, and knows our state, though He may appear to be unconcerned about us; yea, that He is willing to relieve us, when He seems to deny our requests.

The Lord's dealings are often dark and perplexing; but many of them may be explained by this story. It shows us plainly that there may be love in Christ's heart, when there are frowns in His face. It encourages us, though He slay us, to trust in Him.

It often happens, when a person begins to have a little feeling on religious subjects, that he hardly dares to go to Christ, and tell Him of his wants. And yet this poor woman dared; and she was rewarded. We are perhaps deeply conscious of our misery, and yet we doubt if Christ knows it, or cares for it. How encouraging in such a case is her example! Terrible was the conflict she endured. Cloud after cloud passed over her. But at last the sunshine came, and all was bright and peaceful. *Her* faith was amply rewarded; and so will *ours* be. Sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

Never fear then, if thou art conscious of thy misery, and art really anxious to be forgiven. As sure as Christ is in heaven, so surely will He hear thee, and give thee all that thy soul desires. Be not dismayed by a little delay. Wait for His good time. Though He tarry, wait for it. When you are ready for the blessing and fit to receive it, then, and not till then, He will give it you.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

ST. LUKE, XI. 14–28.

Jesus was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say, that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there;

and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lift up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Our Lord, we are here told, had been working a miracle in the case of some poor creature who was possessed of an evil spirit. The people, when they saw the blessed effect of the miracle, were filled with astonishment, and many of them no doubt with thankfulness also.

But some among them, who were ill-disposed towards Jesus, attributed the cure that had been wrought to the power of Beelzebub, a name that was given to the chief of the devils. Instead of acknowledging that our Lord had cast out the evil spirit by His own almighty power, they blasphemously declared that he was in league with the Devil himself. Others too, who were not convinced by the miracle, dared Him, as it were, to give them some sign, still more unmistakable, that He was really the Son of God.

Our Lord reasons with them, and points out to them the utter folly of their

accusation. He shows them the absurdity of supposing that Satan would oppose his own interests, and ruin his own cause. It would be like a kingdom or a household divided against itself, which in that case would soon be broken up.

Satan is too wise for that. He employs his servants to work *for* him, and not to work *against* him. His great endeavour is to strengthen and enlarge his own kingdom, and not to weaken and destroy it. It was folly then to accuse our Lord of being in partnership with Satan.

He uses yet *another* argument with them. He asks them how their own followers, who professed to cast out devils—for there were some among them who laid claim to this power, and called themselves Exorcists, or expellers of evil spirits—how they were enabled to do so. For surely, if they accused Him of doing the work by the power of the Evil One, they would also be accusing their brethren.

Having said this, He solemnly reminds them, that if He was indeed acting by the power and authority of God Himself, then this ought to be a proof to them that the

kingdom of God was at hand, and they must either fall in with it, or deliberately reject it; 'If I with the finger (or power) of God cast out devils, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.'

But our Lord is not content to leave the matter there. Having said so much of Satan's power, He goes on to say yet more. He uses a very striking comparison. He compares the Evil One to a powerful warrior, who has got hold of a certain palace or dwelling; and He compares Himself to one still more powerful, who overcomes him, strips him of his armour, and deprives him of his spoils, that is, what he has seized hold of. The palace, or dwelling, is man's heart; for within every sinner does the evil spirit dwell, until Christ comes and takes possession by His grace.

Now let us look at our Lord's words, 'When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace.' When Satan has any one completely under his power, he usually lulls him to sleep. There is generally a little struggle at first to get free, a little show of resistance. But by

degrees the effort becomes weaker and weaker, until all is yielded up; and then there is no longer any conflict. Satan has gained his point. We are his prisoners; yea, his willing bond-slaves. And now all is quiet; for the soul is hushed into a deadly slumber.

Such is the sad state of thousands. But thank God not with all. For there is a stronger than the strong one. There is one who is Satan's Master; and who is able to dethrone him. The Devil has *great* power; but he has not *all* power. He is *mighty;* but not *all*-mighty. He can *tempt* us; but he cannot *force* us to commit sin. When he assaulted our Lord, He had power to resist him. And when he assaults us, we too may overcome him in our Saviour's strength. If Christ fights for us, we are sure of victory; for hear what our Lord says, 'When a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.'

But in this warfare we must be decided. We must be clearly on the Lord's

side, or He will refuse to fight our battles. For does He not say, 'He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth?'

How many are only half-hearted! They are neither altogether for Christ, nor yet for Satan. And what is the consequence? They lose the Saviour's friendship. They forfeit His help. They gain no victories. The strong man armed still keeps his palace. They are his now, and will be his for ever.

How is it with you? Has the strong one been overcome in your case? You may fancy that all is well, and yet you may be deceiving yourself; for 'there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.' You may fancy that all is well, and yet you may be under the mastery of Satan: there may be a peace within which is a false peace. Christ may never have made an entrance into your heart. He may again and again have pleaded for admission. He may often have stood at the door, and knocked; and yet He may have knocked in vain. Oh admit Him now. Welcome Him to your

heart. Say unto Him, 'Lord, come in, and take possession. Drive out every intruder; and be Thou alone master of the palace.'

But our Lord has yet more to say concerning the Evil One. He goes on, in the twenty-fourth verse, to speak of him as leaving his dwelling for a time, and then returning to it, and gaining possession again; 'When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest: and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.'

Satan often leaves the sinner's soul *for a time*. He is conscience-smitten. A sermon arouses him from his slumber; or an illness makes him thoughtful. He seems to be an altered person; and we begin to hope that there is a real work of grace. But alas we are disappointed. Satan is gone, but to return again with fresh

temptations. He is here represented as 'walking through dry places, seeking rest.' This is to show us how busy and active he is; how he is ever 'going about seeking whom he may devour.' He spares no effort, until if possible he regains his lost possession. And when he returns to his house, he finds it 'swept and garnished.' This means that he finds the sinner's heart a little cleansed perhaps, but still unoccupied, and therefore ready to receive him back. Christ is not dwelling there; and so he enters in, and becomes more firmly established than ever.

But when he thus comes back, he is said to take to him 'seven other spirits more wicked than himself.' This means that when the Evil One has for a time left the heart, and then is again allowed to return, he comes with sevenfold more power than he had before. The sinful person becomes more sinful than ever. 'The last state of that man is worse than the first.'

Is it not a fact, that if there is one being more thoroughly wretched, and more disposed to run headlong into sin, than

another, it is he who at one time seemed to give up what was evil, and then has welcomed it again? If Satan has once left a soul, and afterwards returns to it, he always comes back with increased power; and the unhappy sinner plunges the more desperately into wickedness.

Oh that God may shield us from such an attack from our great spiritual enemy! And if we have once 'tasted of the heavenly gift,' and opened the door of our hearts to Christ, may we never again allow Satan even for a moment to gain the advantage over us!

The best way to ensure this is to have our hearts filled with the presence of Christ; for if Satan can only find them 'empty, swept, and garnished,' ready in short to receive him, he will enter in, and dwell there, never perhaps to depart any more.

We are not told what effect this wonderful discourse of our Lord's had upon the Pharisees who heard it. It must have convinced them, even against their will, that His power was from above.

And yet they probably went away more enraged than ever against Him.

But there was one at all events in that company, whose heart was touched by what she heard from the Saviour. And she was bold enough openly to express her feelings. 'Blessed,' she exclaimed, 'is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.' She was filled with admiration at His wisdom, His power, and His love; and she almost envied the holy Mother who had borne Him. Our Lord turned to her and spoke in her ear words which she perhaps never forgot; 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.'

Our Lord spoke to the same effect on another occasion. For when they came and told Him that His Mother and His brethren were come, He turned to His disciples and said, 'Behold my Mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.'

Mary was blessed in having given birth to our Lord; but still more blessed in

having borne the Saviour in her heart. It was a great honour to be so nearly related to Him as she was. But a still greater honour is it to know Him, and to love Him; to hear His word, and keep it.

And such honour may be ours. Happy are we, if the word of Christ is precious to us; if we love to hear it; if its sound is sweet to us; and if our chief desire is to keep it, and to bring our lives under its daily influence.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

ST. JOHN, VI. 1–14.*

Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lift up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.) Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley-loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled he said unto his disciples, Gather up the frag-

* The same portion of Scripture, with the exception of the four first verses, is appointed for the Gospel on the Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.

ments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley-loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.

Our Lord, during the three years of His active ministry, spent much of His time on the shores of the Sea of Galilee or Tiberias. There were several small fishing-towns along the borders of the sea; and here it was that He collected together most of His disciples, and worked many of His miracles.

We are told, in the first verse, that He 'went over the Sea of Galilee;' that is, He passed from where He then was to another spot on the opposite side of the lake, which people were constantly doing for merchandise, and for other purposes. And we are further told that a great crowd of people followed Him, having been drawn around Him by the miracles which they had seen Him perform.

On reaching the shore, Jesus left the multitude for a while, and went up into a mountain with His disciples; being anxious no doubt to get away from the crowd, and

to spend a few hours in prayer and in communion with His heavenly Father.

It is mentioned that 'the Passover was nigh,' to mark the time when the circumstance occurred.

Our Lord then joins the multitude again; and seeing that the numbers were very great, and that most of the people had been for some time without food, He begins to inquire how they could be fed. Turning to Philip, who belonged to one of the towns in the neighbourhood, He asks how this could be done; 'Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?' To purchase food on the spot Jesus knew to be impossible, as it was a desert place. But He asked the question, in order plainly to show them how great was the difficulty. His own mind was made up, that the supply should come from Himself. Philip replies, that to feed so large a company an enormous amount of bread would be needed, supposing that every person should have something. The very cost of the food would be two hundred pence, or six or seven pounds of our money, even supposing it could be procured.

Upon this, another disciple steps forward, and tells Jesus that a lad was there with a little basket of provisions, which he had probably brought for sale. But what did they consist of? Only five loaves of bread, and two small fishes: 'and what (he asks) are they among so many?'

Such were the resources of the place. Here was a gathering of hungry people, to the number of five thousand or more; and the supply amounted to what would have been barely enough to feed one in fifty, or even one in a hundred of them!

It must have greatly surprised them, when our Lord bade them sit down upon the grass for a meal. Could He be in earnest? thought they. Could He mean to feed them? Yes, and perhaps on more than one face there was a smile at the very idea of such a multitude being supplied.

But there was a tone of authority in the Saviour's voice, which soon inspired confidence. It seemed to tell them that He had a power which they knew not of. They instantly obeyed, and waited patiently the result. Every eye was turned towards Him.

There stood the Saviour, with the basket which He had received from the lad. He looks up to heaven, thanks God, and asks a blessing; and then begins to dole out its contents. The first row are supplied; and still much remains. One after another is fed; and the quantity, instead of being diminished, rather *increases*; until at length all are satisfied; five thousand mouths are filled. It was the widow's meal and oil over again. But it was even more remarkable. For in her case, 'the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.' But here the food became even more abundant as the people ate. There was more at the end than at the beginning. For when they had finished, our Lord bids some two or three to go round, and gather up the fragments, lest any should be wasted. And what was the result? They collected no less than twelve basketfuls of provisions, after each person had had enough.

Here then was a remarkable miracle. And what did it prove?

First, it proved our Lord's *divine power*.

It showed that He was more than man; that He was God in the form of man; for He was able to *create* food, when He chose to do so. On a former occasion one asked Him to turn stones into bread. But He indignantly refused; for there was no need to do so, and it would have been yielding to temptation. But now the miracle is called for: He therefore exerts His almighty power, and thus manifests forth His glory.

Secondly, we see here our Lord's *tender compassion* for the wants of men. Even their bodily wants filled Him with concern. He could not bear to think of their distress. He knew what the pangs of hunger were, for He Himself had felt them.

And so, when *we* are in difficulty or distress, we may look up, and be assured that there is One in heaven, who is touched with a tender concern for us, and is ever ready to come to our help. Man may turn a deaf ear to our complaints, his heart may be steeled against us. But Jesus feels for us, and draws near to comfort us.

Thirdly, we may gather from our Lord's compassion for the bodies of men His readiness to supply *our souls' wants.* Here was a multitude of hungry men ; and He instantly fed them. How much more will He feed us, when we cry unto Him for spiritual food !

When He looks round upon this dark and famished world, and sees thousands 'perishing for lack of knowledge,' is He not filled with compassion for them ? They know not their want, perhaps ; but He knows it : and is He not ready to supply it ? There are but few carrying forth to these perishing souls the bread of life ; but He can bless those few. He can make the five loaves and the two fishes serve for a multitude. He can win souls by their means, and bless their poor endeavours.

And then again, when He sees others who have tasted of 'the meat that endureth to everlasting life,' but are hungering for more ; when He sees them *anxious* to be filled ; when He hears from one and another, 'Lord, evermore give us of this bread, that we may eat and live for ever ;' does

He turn away and refuse them? Oh, no; He is always ready to bestow. He will 'supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.' Go to Him, and say, 'Lord, feed me. Nourish my soul. Give me, not according to my deservings, but according to Thy great bounty, and my pressing need.'

Fourthly, *the thanks which our Lord gave* to His heavenly Father, before He distributed the loaves and fishes, is a lesson to us. It not merely teaches us that we should be thankful; but that we should never sit down to a meal without openly acknowledging the goodness of Him from whom it comes. St. Matthew says, that Jesus 'blessed' the loaves; St. John, that He 'gave thanks.' As *God*, He blessed them; and as *man*, He gave thanks for them. I hope that none of us are in the habit of receiving our daily food without breathing forth a few words of thankfulness to the great and glorious Giver of all our mercies.

Fifthly, our Lord's *care for the Frag-*

ments must not pass without notice. Though He was Lord of all, and had power to provide any quantity of food, He would not have a crumb wasted. What a lesson to us!

Have we *bread* enough and to spare? Let us be careful of it, that we may have to give to those that need. Have we *money* at our disposal? Let us remember that for every shilling that we spend God will have us render an account to Him. Our *time*, too—our precious time—how are we employing it? Oh, prize your spare moments, for they are very short. 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.'

But I must now be bringing what I have to say to a close. We learn from the fourteenth verse what effect this miracle had upon those who had witnessed it.

If there had been any of the Scribes and Pharisees among them, they would probably have raised a cavil. They would have said that our Lord had performed the wondrous work by the power of the devil; or they would have found

some other reason for continuing in their unbelief. But here was a company of plain simple men and women, whose minds were warped by no prejudices. They saw at once that He was from above; and they one and all exclaimed, 'This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world!' This is the great and glorious Messiah that the world is looking for!

We are further told, in the verse that follows, that they were so fully convinced of His greatness, that they were ready to take Him by force, and make Him their king. It is beautiful to see the affectionate eagerness of these simple-minded people—so different from the coldness and hardness of heart which our Lord met with from their rulers.

Oh that we, like them, may long to have the Saviour with us, reigning in our hearts, and bringing every thought into subjection to His will!

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

ST. JOHN, VIII. 46 TO END.

Jesus said, Which of you convinceth me of sin? and if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory; there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing; it is my Father that honoureth me, of whom ye say, that he is your God: yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you; but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.

Our Lord had been conversing with the Pharisees and others. He had been announcing to them, that He was the Light of the world; that God was His Father; and that His gospel proclaimed the only true liberty. His hearers for the most part misunderstood His words; but some few were struck by them, and believed.

And now He appeals to His own holy and consistent conduct; 'Which of you (He asks) convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?' If the Saviour's life had been less holy, then there would have been some reason for them to doubt the truth which He proclaimed; they would have had some cause for suspecting Him of being an impostor. But now they had no cloak for their unbelief.

The fact was, as He here tells them, their hearts were wrong, and they had no taste for the message which God sent them: 'He that is of God heareth God's words;

ye therefore hear them not (or have no pleasure in hearing them), because ye are not of God.' Just as a son delights in his absent father's message; studies it, prizes it, and desires to fulfil it; so is it with God's children. They hear His word with reverence; they love the sound of it; and there is something within, which responds to it. Their language is, 'Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.' Jesus however tells them that it was not so with *them;* 'Ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.'

This stirred up their anger. 'Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?' The Jews looked upon the Samaritans as enemies to their church and nation. To call any one then a *Samaritan* was to express contempt for him, and to brand him as an unbeliever. But they went yet further, and accused our Lord of having a devil, of being possessed by an evil spirit.

How does the Saviour answer this insulting accusation? He might at once have struck them dumb for their scornful

language, or He might have called down fire from heaven, and consumed them on the spot. But no, He bears with them, meekly replying, 'I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory; there is one that seeketh (that is, seeketh my glory) and judgeth.' A person who is influenced by the devil would seek his own glory. His great aim would be to exalt himself, and not to honour God.

Our Lord then adds a most glorious truth; 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.' He had before been telling them that His gospel proclaimed the truest liberty, and that if the Son made them free, they would be free indeed. But now He tells them of something even better than liberty. He tells them of a never-ending life which He could give them. 'If a man keep my saying (that is, if he believes my gospel) he shall never see death.'

Here indeed was a blessed announcement. They had already been told (as we find from the sixth chapter) that He was

the Bread of Life. 'This is the Bread which cometh down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.' And now, again, He plainly declares that in Him there is full deliverance from death.

What a comforting truth for us! We all shrink from death. How blessed then to know that we may escape its power; and that by believing in Christ we 'pass from death unto life.' We shall still die; but if we are one with Him, then death has lost its sting for us, and the grave its victory. Death is but the gate, through which we shall pass to a new and more glorious life. Our bodies will lie down in the grave; but our better part will go into God's presence, and remain there for ever.

But let us see how the Pharisees received this saying. Did such new and unlooked-for tidings bring any joy to them? Did they value our Lord's words, and feel their preciousness? Alas, no! They received them with cold unbelief. They understood them not. 'Then said the Jews unto Him, Now we know that

Thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets, and Thou sayest, If a man keep My saying, he shall never taste of death. Art Thou greater than our Father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest Thou Thyself?'

They had a great respect for their forefather Abraham and the prophets. But they knew that, great as they were, they had died. How then could it be that Jesus was able to set any one free from the curse of death? For they seemed to be thinking of no other death than that which separates the soul from the body. They had no idea that He was speaking of that death which for ever separates the soul from God. Our Lord's language therefore appeared to them like presumption; and they immediately exclaimed, 'Art Thou greater than our father Abraham?'

Jesus replies by telling them that He had no desire to honour Himself, but that His heavenly Father had put honour upon Him; 'Jesus answered, If I honour Myself, My honour is nothing: it is My Father that honoureth Me, of whom ye say, that

He is your God. Yet ye have not known Him, but I know Him; and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you. But I know Him, and keep His saying.'

He then again refers to Abraham, and plainly tells them that He existed before Abraham; and that Abraham looked forward with a joyful hope to His coming. 'Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus saith unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.'

It is clear from these words that Abraham and the Patriarchs of old looked to the coming Saviour with the eye of faith. The hope of His one day appearing cheered their hearts. They saw Him, but not now: they beheld Him, but not nigh. He was the Star that gladdened them even in their gloomiest night. They lived in hope, and died in faith, 'not having received the promises (or the blessings promised), but having seen them afar off, and were per-

suaded of them, and embraced them.' It is true, they had but a dim view of the Great Deliverer who was to come ; and they probably knew but little what sort of a Saviour He was to be. But they believed that He *would* come, and there they found rest.'

The word here used to express Abraham's feeling is a very strong one. It means in the Greek something more than simple joy. It means that his soul *leapt forward,* as it were, in earnest hope and expectation. It was just such a feeling as a person has who desires to see a long-expected friend that is coming to him. He runs forward, now and then jumping up to see if he can discover him. So it was with Abraham. He 'rejoiced (*i.e.* he desired with a very great longing) to see the day of Christ.'

Our Lord's declaration too that He was 'before Abraham' is very important. You will observe He does not merely say that He had *seen* Abraham ; but He says, 'Before Abraham was, *I am.*' This is a remarkable expression. It is the same which the Lord used when speaking of

Himself to Moses from the burning bush; 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.' So here Christ says, 'Before Abraham was, I AM.' He was from the beginning 'God over all, blessed for ever.' The Word was with God, and was God. He whom we shall be reminded of on Good Friday as dying upon the cross; He who was brought before Pontius Pilate as a malefactor; whose back was scourged, and whose head was crowned with thorns; He whose body was carried, by Joseph of Arimathea, as a lifeless corpse to the grave; He who became man for our sakes, a poor, suffering, scorned, and dying man; could yet say, 'I and My Father are one;' 'Before Abraham was, I am.'

Blessed Saviour, Thou art God; and therefore I will trust Thee with my soul's salvation. Thou art God, and therefore able to save. And Thou too art man, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; Thou therefore art one with me. Thou canst feel for me, and knowest all my wants. Thou hast suffered for me, that I might not suffer, as my sins deserve. Perfect

Saviour, in Thee I find all that my soul needs.

There is one remark of these Pharisees, which I must not pass over. They said to our Lord, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old.' Now, Jesus was only a little more than thirty at this time. How was it that they guessed His age so wrongly? Is there not something very touching in this mistake of theirs? May it not have been that His sorrows had so bowed Him down; that grief had made its furrows so deep on that sacred brow; that it had left upon Him the marks of age? He was 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;' and He probably bore this stamp on His very countenance. Satan's malice had done its work. Man's unbelief and hardness of heart had often pierced Him to the very quick. The iron had entered His very soul. The three last years of His life were years of intense suffering, and their weight told upon Him. 'His visage was so marred more than any man; and His form more than the sons of men.' And if this really was the cause of the Pharisees' mistake, there is

something in it very touching ; and it may well increase our reverence for the Saviour, and draw out our tenderest love towards Him.

Let us now see what effect our Lord's conversation had on His hearers. They were not only unable to comprehend the deep and precious truths which had fallen from His lips ; but their anger was stirred up to such a pitch, that they could bear with Him no longer.

There was one thing however that they clearly understood ; namely, that He claimed to be God. For they immediately took up stones to cast at Him, as one guilty of blasphemy. If you turn to Lev. xxiv. 16, you will see that this was the regular punishment of a blasphemer under the Jewish Law ; 'He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall stone him.'

But where could they find the stones, as they were in the Temple ? At this time the repairs of the Temple were probably unfinished, and there may have been stones

lying about in consequence, which they eagerly seized and made use of.

They were in the Temple. But the sacredness of the building was no check upon them. They were ready to murder Jesus on the spot. He had spoken of Himself as God ; but they had not eyes to see His Godlike nature. He had announced Himself as the Light and Life of the world ; but they loved darkness and death, and so His errand was unwelcome to them. They were like the people of Gadara, who prayed Him to depart out of their coasts.

Christ proved His power by hiding Himself, and passing away through the midst of them. He did this once before, when the people of Nazareth laid hands on Him, and were ready to cast Him headlong down a precipice. On that occasion it is said, that 'He, passing through the midst of them, went His way.'

How sad that He, who was laden with blessings, should be forced to escape for His life from those on whom He was so ready to bestow them. Alas! they knew not what a benefactor they had among them. They knew not what mercies they

were putting away from them. Perhaps—and, oh, what a fearful thought!—perhaps those men never heard the Saviour's voice again. Their opportunity was gone. They had rejected Him. And never *will* they hear it as a voice of love. They will only hear it as a voice of wrath, on that day when they will stand trembling before His judgment throne.

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE EASTER.

St. Matt. xxvii. 1–54.

When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus, to put him to death. And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas who had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called The field of blood, unto this day. (Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.) And Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they

witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word, insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment-seat his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews. And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him,

and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there: and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save: if he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold, the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent,

and the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

THE portion of Scripture for to-day's Gospel is longer than on any other Sunday. We enter to-day upon that most solemn and eventful week, in which our blessed Lord suffered. And our Church brings before us day after day the accounts given by the Four Evangelists of all the circumstances connected with the Saviour's death.

As this Gospel includes nearly a whole Chapter, we cannot of course examine it verse by verse. We will fix upon some of the leading events contained in it.

1stly. We have the handing over of our Lord to Pontius Pilate;

2ndly. The miserable end of the traitor Judas;

3rdly. The examination of our Lord before Pilate, and his cowardly verdict;

4thly. The Saviour's Crucifixion;

5thly. The conduct of those who witnessed it;

6thly. The remarkable circumstances attending it.

We will take each of these separately, touching very briefly upon them. And while dwelling on these very solemn subjects, may holy feelings be stirred up within us!

1. The first two verses tell us of Jesus being *handed over to Pontius Pilate.* The Saviour had now been more than thirty years upon earth. He had lived a holy and sinless life. He had done deeds of love and mercy. He had brought salvation to a ruined world, and especially to the Jews. But these were the very ones who all along despised and rejected Him, and who now delivered Him up to the Roman Governor. They hated Him without a cause; and they were urged on by their Priests and Elders to pursue their victim even unto death.

2. But now we must take off our eyes from this heavenly Prisoner, and fix them for a few moments on that basest of all characters, *the traitor Judas.* St. Matthew tells us more about him than any of the other Evangelists. Having betrayed his Master to the Jewish authorities; having stood by whilst He was seized, and hurried off to the Judgment Hall; and having witnessed the unmistakable signs of His approaching condemnation; his cowardly heart at length gave way, and the bitterest feeling of remorse came over him. He takes back the thirty pieces of silver, the paltry bribe which he had bargained for, and throws it down at the feet of the Chief Priests and Elders, exclaiming, 'I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' He meets with no pity from them. They only treat his sorrow with scorn, and jeer him for expressing it; 'What is that to us? See thou to that.' In his misery he turns away from them, leaves the ill-gotten money on the temple floor, and hastens off to destroy himself.

St. Matthew says, that 'he repented

himself.' But it was a false, not a true repentance. There was an abundance of sorrow and agony in that wretched heart, but no turning to the Saviour. He hated himself for the act that he had done; but he felt no love to Jesus. 'It was the sorrow of the world' that 'worketh death;' and not that godly sorrow which brings a man on his knees before an offended God.

The Chief Priests, we are told, took the money; and not daring to put it into the treasury, as it was the price of blood, they purchased with it a piece of ground for a public cemetery.

3. And now *Jesus stands before the Governor,* who examines Him, but soon finds that nothing worthy of death can be proved against Him. Having another prisoner as well as Jesus in custody, he proposes to release one of the two, hoping that they might choose our Lord. But this proposal fails; for they one and all cry out for the release of Barabbas, and the condemnation of Jesus.

At this crisis a message is brought into court from Pilate's wife, telling him of a

dream she had had, and warning him not to condemn the Just One now standing before him.

What was he to do? Knowing that his Prisoner was innocent, he ought at once boldly and fearlessly to have acquitted Him; but he had not the courage to do this; the clamour was so loud against Him. And so he hands Him over to the Jews, and thinks to excuse himself by saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.' And then he washes his hands before them, as if to say, 'I am clear of taking part in this unjust transaction.'

Barabbas the robber is then set at liberty; and Jesus is delivered up to the soldiers, who treat Him with every mark of scorn and cruelty.

4thly. And now *He is led away to be crucified.* St. John tells us, that as He toiled along the road to Calvary, He was forced to bear the very cross on which He was to be nailed. But here St. Matthew says that they compelled one Simon, a man of Cyrene, to bear it. Which account

are we to receive? Both are no doubt true. Simon bore it as well as Jesus. For, as the cross was heavy, the strength of two was probably needed to bear its weight.

Happy Simon! It was intended no doubt as a disgrace; but was it not in fact an honour to be chosen for such a work? He had perhaps shown a little feeling for our Lord, especially during His cruel persecutions, and therefore they were glad to lay this burden upon him. But doubtless he felt it to be a blessing to share in any way the Saviour's sorrow, and to bear even the smallest portion of His bitter sufferings.

And *we*, too, may be thus blest. We may take up *our* cross, whatever it be, and follow Christ. We may meekly bear it after Him. We may endure the taunts and scorn of men cheerfully for our Master's sake. We may, like Thomas, be ready to die with Him, counting not even our lives dear unto ourselves, from love to our crucified Lord.

I need not now dwell on the actual crucifixion. I will merely observe that the

spot chosen for that awful deed was just outside of the city of Jerusalem, called by St. Luke '*Calvary*,' but here spoken of as '*Golgotha*, a place of a skull;' so named perhaps, because criminals were executed there, and their bones were left unburied.

But let us pass on to notice,

5thly. The conduct of those *who witnessed the crucifixion.*

The first two who are mentioned were the Thieves, who were crucified with our Lord. Their execution happened to take place at the same time; and no doubt it was intended that the companionship of two such criminals should increase the disgrace of His death.

All that is told us concerning them in this passage is, that they joined with the multitude in reviling Him. How sad to think that, even at such a time, the enmity of their hearts should thus show itself! But St. Luke tells us more; namely, that a wondrous change, late but yet real, passed upon one of them. He was so struck by what he beheld, that at the last moment, in the midst of his own dying

agony, he turned to the suffering Saviour with a look of penitence and love, and found in Him pardon and acceptance.

St. Matthew next mentions certain passers-by, who had perhaps heard some words which Jesus had uttered a day or two before; and now taunted Him with them, as though they had turned out to be untrue. 'Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In their blindness, they knew not that when He spoke of the destruction of the temple, and its restoration in three days, He was speaking of His approaching death, and His triumphal resurrection.

There was a large body too of priests and elders, who joined in the scornful language that was uttered. 'He saved others (they exclaimed): Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.' He professes to be the Saviour of others, but He is powerless to deliver Himself. If He will but come down from the cross to which we have

nailed Him, we will acknowledge Him to be our Saviour and our King.

But, no; He came to redeem the world, and to make His soul an offering for sin; and therefore He must drink the cup to its very dregs.

There is yet another important person mentioned in these verses as being present at the Crucifixion. That was the Centurion or Captain of the soldiers who were placed there as a guard. It appears that when he, and those that were with him, observed our Lord's holy conduct, and the words that fell from His lips; when they noticed too all that occurred, of which we shall speak presently; a holy awe came over them, and they exclaimed, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'

They were unbelievers. But there was enough in what they heard and saw to shake their unbelief, to check their scorn, and to draw from them the confession that Jesus could be no other than the Son of God!'

We know not whether this conviction went any further, and whether it led to their conversion. Perhaps it did. And it

may be that more than one of these very soldiers went away with new feelings towards the crucified Saviour.

Lastly, let us dwell for a very few minutes on the *unusual circumstances connected with the Crucifixion.*

For the last three hours before the Saviour expired, there was darkness over all the land. This began at the sixth hour (which was midday) and lasted till the ninth hour (or three o'clock), when Jesus yielded up His spirit. How wonderful was this sudden darkness! Nature itself seemed as it were to put on a garb of mourning, and to take part in the Redeemer's woe.

Another most remarkable circumstance also took place at the moment of His death. 'The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.' Here was a most striking miracle, and it had an important meaning.

This veil, or curtain, separated the holiest place in the temple from the rest, and no one was allowed to enter it but the High Priest, and he but on one day in the

whole year. Now, this holy place was a type or figure of heaven; and the rending of the veil may have signified that the way to heaven was from henceforth open to all, since Christ, the great High Priest, was going to enter in as the forerunner of His people.

Yes, thank God, the way is now opened. And all who desire an entrance may assuredly find it through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

We further read that 'the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent.' Here again nature shared in the general convulsion. The graves too were burst open; and after our Lord's resurrection many departed saints arose from their resting-places, and actually made their appearance in the city of Jerusalem.

Such were the wonders that accompanied our blessed Lord's crucifixion. The event itself was the most marvellous that ever occurred—the Son of God offering Himself a sacrifice for sinful man — the Eternal One suffering, bleeding, dying upon the cross.

May our hearts be moved as we think of our Redeemer's agony! And may we look at Him, whom we have pierced, and mourn!

EASTER DAY.

St. John, xx. 1–10.

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre: and he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie; and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

This is Easter Sunday, a most blessed day in the Christian Church; a day when our hearts may well be filled with joy. And the more we have felt all the sad cir-

cumstances that happened to our Lord during the last few days, the more bright and joyous will this day seem to us.

It was above eighteen hundred years ago that Jesus, our Lord, after suffering more than any other being ever suffered, and all for our sins, did as on this very day rise again, having conquered death, and robbed it of its sting.

Our Lord was crucified on Friday. On that afternoon His body was laid in the cold tomb. Joseph, of Arimathæa, and Nicodemus, two timid disciples, whose faith had grown stronger and stronger as the hour of trial approached, had gone boldly to Pilate, and craved of him the Saviour' body. They had borne it away with loving care, and laid it reverently in the tomb.

The next day was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, a day on which even a visit to the sepulchre would have been accounted wrong.

And now hear what happened on the following morning, our Easter-day. St. John relates the story very simply and very beautifully, in the words chosen for the Gospel. He begins by telling us, that on

'the first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, to the sepulchre.' No watcher ever longed for the dawn more eagerly than she did. Never had the Sabbath hours seemed to her so long as they did on that day, when Jesus lay in the grave. She loved her Lord with the tenderest, warmest affection. And now, at break of day, she hastened anxiously to the sepulchre to see for herself if He were still there. As she hurried on her way, many a solemn thought passed through her mind. She mused on those sufferings which she had witnessed only two days before; and that death upon the cross, so shameful, and yet so glorious. Could the grave keep as its prisoner one so divine and heavenly? Was it possible that they should never behold Him again, who had been such a blessing to the world?

With some such thoughts as these she hastened to the sepulchre. And there, to her astonishment, she found the stone which closed it removed, and the sepulchre itself empty. Having satisfied her own mind as to the fact, she instantly ran off to tell the disciples what she had discovered.

She soon finds Simon Peter, and John the disciple whom Jesus loved. And they were as anxious to hear, as she was to relate, what she had seen. They had perhaps met that morning for the express purpose of paying an early visit together to the tomb; but Mary's visit was even earlier. She tells them that the body of Jesus was no longer there; and for the moment she could only think of some one having disturbed it in its resting-place; 'They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.' She says not a word of His having risen; for though the thought probably passed through her mind, she could not allow herself to express it.

The two disciples immediately proceed to the spot, anxious to see with their own eyes if Mary's report was true.

The younger disciple was the first to reach the place, and he, 'stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying, yet went he not in.' Presently Simon Peter joins him, and immediately enters the sepulchre. And what does he find there? The body of Jesus was gone as

Mary had said. But he sees the grave-clothes, and observes that they were not lying in confusion, as if some one had stolen the body, and hurried off with it, but wrapped up with care. St. John too now looks in, and is satisfied: 'He saw and believed.'

It is remarkable that neither he nor St. Peter seem to have *expected* our Lord's resurrection. Jesus had prepared them for it. He had told them more than once that He would die and rise again. We had an instance of this in the Gospel a few Sundays ago; but, if you remember, we were told that 'they understood none of those things, and that saying was hid from them.'

So it was even now. They neither took in our Lord's words, nor the words that were written concerning Him in the Old Testament. For you will see that it is said in the ninth verse, 'As yet they knew not the Scriptures, that He must rise again from the dead.' *As yet* they knew it not; but soon they would know it, for soon the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them, enlightening their minds, and bring-

ing to their remembrance all that Jesus had said to them.

But even now they had seen a good deal to convince them. They had seen with their own eyes that the grave had lost its tenant. Their master was no longer there. Surely He must be risen! Before that eventful day closed their uncertainty was at an end, and Jesus Himself appeared first to one and then to another of His rejoicing followers.

Meanwhile these two disciples 'went away again unto their own homes.' St. Peter, who was a married man, went to his own family perhaps, and told them what he had seen, and what were his hopes and expectations concerning his Master. And St. John, when he reached his home, probably found there one, who felt the deepest interest in every circumstance which he had just witnessed. The holy Mother had now taken up her abode with him; and it must have been no small comfort to him to pour out his tale into such willing ears.

They both went to their own homes, for they both needed a little time for quiet

thought and prayer. And they were glad enough to turn aside from the busy world, which had now almost forgotten the startling events of the last few days.

Here the Gospel for the day ends. But we know what afterwards occurred; how that the risen Saviour appeared first to Mary Magdalene, as she lingered near the sacred spot where He had been laid; how He afterwards showed Himself to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus; and then, as evening drew on, how He stood in the midst of His eleven Apostles, as they were gathered together. We know too how He remained upon earth, going in and out among His brethren for nearly six weeks; and how at length He left them, and returned to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.

Most important and most glorious was the resurrection of our Lord!

Without it His sacrifice would have been powerless; His atonement would not have been complete. The Saviour's resurrection showed that God was satisfied,

and that the price paid for man's sins was accepted. And now we may look to His cross, and feel that the whole weight of our sins was borne there; that a sufficient ransom was provided; and that every true penitent may find acceptance for His sake.

Again, if He had not risen, and then ascended up to His Father's presence, we could not, as we now do, look upon Him as our living Head. We could not enjoy the comfort of feeling that He is ever watching over us, strengthening us in our weakness, guiding us in our difficulties, and interceding for us before His Father's throne.

And further, if He had not risen, what certainty could we feel that we shall rise again? But now His resurrection is a pledge of ours—'Christ the first-fruits, then they that are Christ's at His coming.' Death has therefore lost its chiefest gloom.

In our beautiful Collect for Easter-eve, death is spoken of, not as a dark and dreary messenger; not as the king of terrors; but as the 'gate' through which we 'pass to our joyful resurrection.'

Our Burial Service takes also the same happy view of death.

That Service may almost be called a Resurrection Service, so crowded is it with the assurance that the dead shall live again. Our Church supposes that the thoughts of the mourners are engrossed with the loss of their departed one; that their grief is bitter because the eye has been closed which used to beam on them kindly, and the voice been hushed which so often spoke to them in loving accents. She therefore dwells much on the resurrection, because she wishes to comfort the afflicted by telling them that the eye that is now dim shall again sparkle with life, and the voice that is now silent shall again utter speech. Therefore, when they reach the churchyard, she meets them with the tidings of a resurrection. Although the tombstones around all tell the tale of death, she bids her ministers tell the tale, the better tale, the Gospel tale, of victory through Christ. The very first words we are directed to utter, when we meet the funeral procession, are the words of the great Conqueror Himself, 'I am the resurrection and

the life. Whosoever believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.' And presently, whilst the body is lowered into the grave, and weeping friends press forward to take a last long look, we are told to speak of a 'sure and certain hope of the resurrection of eternal life.'

Yes, Scripture tells us that we shall rise again; and our Church echoes the glorious truth: and all is assured to us by the resurrection of our Lord on this day.

May this comfort our hearts, and brighten our hope, as we journey on through this dying world! May we be as children of the resurrection, not hanging down our heads with sorrow, as if our Lord was in the grave, and our hopes were buried there; but going on our way rejoicing, full of hope, full of confidence, full of strength! The thought that Jesus lives in heaven, as our all-powerful Friend, Helper, and Advocate; that we are never alone, for that He is always with us; and that soon we shall be with Him, sitting on His throne, and sharing His glory; is indeed one full of joy and comfort.

Let us look often to the cross where

Jesus paid our debt. Let us look often to the grave, where Jesus went, and where we must go. But let us look oftener to that throne above, where Jesus sits at His Father's right hand. Let our faith rest upon a risen and exalted Saviour; and let us live more as those who belong to Christ, and are heirs of His heavenly kingdom.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

St. John, xx. 19–23.

The same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Our Church takes care that we shall not easily forget the glorious event which took place last Sunday. For to-day again she calls back our attention to the risen Saviour, and reminds us of a most interesting circumstance which occurred on the evening of His resurrection.

The disciples were now gathered to-

gether in some room at Jerusalem. The object of their meeting was, no doubt, to strengthen each other's faith, and to comfort each other's hearts after all that had happened; and also to take counsel together as regards their future prospects. Christian converse must have been very sweet to them at such a time; and doubtless many an earnest prayer was poured forth from their full hearts. Two or three of them had seen the risen Saviour; and probably they had all heard the report of His being alive again. Each one tells his tale; and some express their doubts, and others their conviction, that they would yet see Him again.

It must have been a very solemn meeting; and all the more solemn, because they had reason to fear lest the people, who had so lately been shouting, 'Crucify him, Crucify him,' might now desire to wreak their vengeance on His followers.

We gather from what St. John says, that their meeting was a secret one; it was held in the evening, and with closed doors, for fear of the Jews. But the very danger that threatened them made them feel all

the more the preciousness of those bright hopes which supported them.

Suddenly one appears in the midst of them, whose presence filled them with a holy awe, and yet with joy. It was their Master and their Friend. It was He whom, three days ago, they had seen expire on the cross. And now He stood before them, the same Saviour whom they knew so well. And yet in more than one of their minds perhaps a momentary doubt existed, as to whether it was really Jesus who stood there.

Presently, however, He shows them His hands and His side—those hands which they had seen nailed to the accursed tree, and that side which had been pierced by the soldier's spear. This our Lord did, because He knew their weakness, and the difficulty they had to believe in His resurrection; and so He kindly condescended to their infirmity.

How very considerate and gracious was this act; and how plainly it shows the Saviour's readiness to meet all our difficulties! Never does He break the bruised

reed, or quench the smoking flax. He is ever ready to 'give power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.' He is not ashamed of His wounds. He glories in them. He loves to think of them, and to show them to His people, as the price paid for their redemption, as the healing remedy for all their ills. Jesus bade the disciples look at His scars. And He would have us remember them too. For thus He shows us that He gained the victory for us by His sufferings; and thus He reminds us of His death, and stirs up in us a constant sense of gratitude and love.

But this was not all. The moment He entered the room, His lips had breathed forth words of encouragement, 'Peace be unto you.' And now He utters again the same sweet consoling words, 'Peace be unto you.' And then He adds, 'As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.'

Now, these were not only very comforting words, but very important words also. Observe, Jesus gives His disciples their charge, and sends them forth to proclaim His truth; 'As my Father sent me, even so send I you.' Nearly two years before, He had given them their first commission. He had said, 'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. He that receiveth you receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.' And now He repeats His commission to them, 'As the Father sent me, even so send I you.'

It is an unspeakable comfort to Christ's ministers to feel that they are 'sent' by Him, and bear His authority; that the message they deliver is His message; that the sacraments they administer are His sacraments; and that they can stand up in His name, and ask you to receive them for His sake.

And you in one sense are also 'sent'—not to preach the Gospel, nor to administer the Sacraments, but to bear your testimony to Christ by your life and conversation. To every Christian man and woman Christ

says, 'You have a work to do for Me; you have a light that may shine before men. There is some good you may accomplish in the world. Go forth and do it. As My Father sent Me, so send I you. And soon I shall return, and reckon with My servants.'

But it is clear from what follows that this commission was *especially* intended for those who were to minister in His name. Presently He breathed on them, and said unto them, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' As Christians, they had already received the Holy Ghost, to convert their hearts, and to draw them to the Saviour. But now, having entrusted them with a high and holy commission, He imparts to them, in a still further degree, this precious gift. He endues them with fresh power from above to fit them for their great work. And surely, if any need the special teaching of the Holy Spirit, it is God's ministers, who are called to teach others; if any need converting grace, it is those whose office it is to turn men from Satan unto God; if any need the comforting, strengthening, sanctifying influences of the Spirit, it is those who are

to win souls, and bring them up for heaven. Yes, and I believe Christ does give His Holy Spirit largely and freely to every one of His true ministers. He calls them to an important work, and He withholds not the needed help.

Our Lord adds, 'Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.' What did He mean by this? Did He mean to give to His Apostles power to forgive sins in their own name? No! this power belongs only to God. He alone can say, 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' What He *did* mean was, I think, that they had His authority to *declare* forgiveness to the believing penitent, and to condemn those who were hardened and unbelieving. Thus we find St. Paul writing to the Corinthians, concerning a penitent in their church, 'To whom ye forgive anything I forgive also: for if I forgave anything, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ.'

And then, on the other hand, we find him putting out of the Church wilful and

notorious offenders, like Hymenæus and Alexander, whom he says, 'I have delivered unto Satan (that is, I have excommunicated, or put out of the congregation) that they may learn not to blaspheme.'

In this way the Apostles exercised the power which Christ gave them. And no doubt, according to His most sure promise, the sentence which they passed, whether of acquittal or condemnation, was ratified and confirmed by God Himself.

And this authority He gives to all His ministers now. They cannot by any power of themselves remit a single sin. They cannot pardon a single transgressor. They can only point to the Cross, where pardon is to be found. They can only lead men to that atoning Fountain, where they may wash and be clean.

It is thus, and thus alone, that the minister pronounces absolution in our Morning and Evening Services. He tells you, that God 'hath given power and commandment to His ministers to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins.' But he adds, '*He* pardoneth and

absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy gospel.'

I will give you an illustration, which will perhaps make this clearer to you. Under the Jewish Law the Leper was cut off from the congregation. He was considered unclean, and forbidden to mix with his brethren. It was a rare thing for anyone afflicted with the disease of leprosy to recover. Sometimes however the person *did* recover. The disease gradually left him. His skin regained its former appearance, and his health and strength returned. But even then the person was not considered clean, until the priest, God's minister, pronounced him to be so, and gave him permission to return to his brethren.

Now, the priest had no power to cure his leprosy; but he had power, he had authority, to *declare* him cured. So it is with the disease of sin. Christ's ministers cannot put away sin; but their office is to pronounce forgiveness in the case of every true penitent.

Here is one great difference between us and the Church of Rome. They assume a certain power, which we believe Christ

never granted to any man on earth. We are content with the blessed privilege of *declaring* forgiveness in our Master's name, to every one who believes on Him, and is content to seek pardon at His hands. We cannot look into the heart. We cannot know for certain our brother's spiritual state; and therefore we neither desire nor dare to go one step beyond this, lest we should break some heart which the Lord has not broken, or bind up some wound which He has not closed.

One word more. It is said, that when the disciples had beheld their Lord, and had been shown the actual marks of His crucifixion, they were fully satisfied; 'Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.' We may share their gladness. We cannot behold Him with our bodily eyes; but the eye of faith may rest upon Him and rejoice. We may lift up our hearts to Him and realise His presence; we may feel that He is with us,—with us, when we meet together for prayer, with us in our daily course. Yes, there is indeed One seated on the throne above, who is our

Friend, 'whom having not seen we love, in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

St. John, x. 11–16.

Jesus said, I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

Our Lord, in the beginning of this chapter, speaks of certain False Guides, such as the Scribes and Pharisees, men who had 'not entered by the door into the sheepfold,' but had climbed up some other way.' These had come, not to save souls, but to ruin them. Like thieves and robbers, their object was to steal, and to kill, and to

destroy, rather than to spread life and peace around them.

And this leads our Lord to speak of Himself in the verses before us as the true Guide of His people; 'I am the good Shepherd.' He does not merely say, I am a Shepherd, among many others; but He declares Himself to be the pattern Shepherd, the true, real, and perfect Shepherd, the good Shepherd.

From the earliest ages God had been pleased to reveal Himself to His people under the likeness of a Shepherd. The ancient Church looked forward to the coming of the Saviour, as the Shepherd and Preserver of Israel. The dying Patriarch Jacob spoke of Him to his assembled children in this remarkable manner; 'From thence is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel.' Gen. xlix. 24. 'Behold,' says Isaiah, 'the Lord God will come . . . . He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.' Isa. xl. 11. The Prophet Ezekiel declares, 'Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search my

sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep.' 'And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David (that is, the spiritual David, Jesus the Son of David); he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.' Ezek. xxxiv. 12, 23.

While the Prophets thus hailed the Saviour's coming, they were not ignorant of His gracious purpose to lay down His life for His flock; and therefore we find Zechariah inspired to write, 'Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' Zech. xiii. 7.

When the fulness of the time was come, and Jesus appeared on earth, He claimed to be the true Shepherd. We must not look upon this title then merely as a beautiful emblem which seemed at the moment to describe His love and care for His people; but we must regard it as the proper title, which belonged to Him alone. He therefore declares twice

over in this chapter, 'I am the good Shepherd.'

And do we not at once see the suitableness of this title? Did He not come to be the Leader, the Provider, the Saviour of His people? His heart was full of love towards them; He cared for them, as no Shepherd ever cared for his flock; He set them an example of perfect holiness; and did more for them than any other could do.

But it will be best to take His own words, as they stand here before us.

1st. He says, 'The good Shepherd *giveth his life* for his sheep.' He was not only willing to give up His time, and His ease, and His heavenly glory for them; He not only lived for them here on earth, and suffered for them; but He was willing to die for them. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;' and yet this is what Christ did. Aye, and even more, He 'died for *the ungodly;*' 'When we were *yet sinners,* Christ died for us.'

But observe, 2ndly, how marked *the*

difference in this respect between Him and the False Shepherds. They were mere hirelings, and the sheep were not theirs. They had no real interest in them. They loved them not. And thus, when danger threatened, they thought only of their own safety, and cared not for the sheep.

Such is the character of every False Shepherd. He flees when he ought to stand his ground; yields up the interest of the flock, when he ought to maintain them; hides himself, when he ought to be seen; and is silent, when he ought to speak. And all this shows that he has no real concern for the welfare of his sheep, but that he has more regard for his own comfort and safety, than for their salvation. 'He that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.'

So much for the treacherous Hireling. How different was it with Jesus the Good Shepherd! He is no hireling. The sheep are His own. See how He declares this

in chap. xvii. He speaks of His beloved people, as those whom His Father gave Him out of the world; 'Thine they were, and thou gavest them me.' 'Those that thou gavest me have I kept, and none of them is lost, but the Son of Perdition.' And then He declares it to be the longing desire of his heart to have them with Him in His heavenly Kingdom; 'Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am.'

Jesus cared for His sheep whilst He was upon earth, loving them, and protecting them from every foe. And He still watches over them; He shields them in all their dangers, upholds them in their weakness, and strengthens them in their daily conflicts.

But, 3rdly, Jesus here tells us that He and His people are *known to one another;* 'I know my sheep, and am known of mine.'

Christ's people are often misunderstood by the world around them. Their feelings are mistaken; their goodness is overlooked; and they themselves, instead of being

honoured, often meet with persecution and scorn.

But meanwhile Christ with His all-seeing eye marks their course. Their state, their character, their wants, their feelings, are known to Him; and so too are all their sorrows and joys.

But when our Lord says that He 'knows His sheep,' something more is meant than a mere acquaintance with all their circumstances and history. It means that He is deeply interested in their welfare, that their concerns are His, and that everything connected with them is near His heart.

It is like the knowledge which we have of those who are nearest and dearest to us. Or rather, it is something even deeper; for nothing in this world can be compared to it. And therefore our Lord adds, 'As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father;' as much as to say, 'My knowledge of you is as true and as deep as the Father's knowledge of me.'

You will observe that Christ's knowledge of His sheep is put before *their* acquaintance with Him, because He knew and loved them before they knew and loved

Him. 'We love him (says the Apostle) because he first loved us.'

This is indeed a source of much comfort to every true servant of Christ. He knows his Master, and is known of Him. Christ looks upon His people with an eye of favour, and they look up to Him with an eye of faith.

When *Joseph* was sold into Egypt, he must have felt very forlorn in that land of strangers, among those who knew him not, and cared not for him. But his comfort was that there was One above who was his God, and who cared for him as a father careth for his child.

Look at *Job* too in the midst of his affliction. Picture to yourself his misery, when one after another wrongfully accused him, when his friends turned against him, and the wife of his bosom was strange to him. He was ready to sink beneath his trial. But there was one thought that cheered and comforted him, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth;' and again, 'My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.' I may be misunderstood and misrepresented, but my Lord knows all.

Again, when *St. Paul* was in the dungeon at Philippi, or *St. John* an exile in the Isle of Patmos, they were cut off from all who cared for them on earth. They were surrounded by men who accounted their conduct folly, and who ridiculed their dearest hopes; but they felt that their Lord was near, that every danger and every trial they encountered was known to Him, and that He would carry them through.

And so it is now. We may be little thought of by our fellow-men; we may be passed by and forgotten; we may meet with scorn where we look for kindness; but if we are Christ's disciples it matters little. We are known to Him. 'The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous.' His 'steps are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way.'

4thly. The Saviour speaks, in the last of these verses, of *other sheep* besides those who were then gathered around Him; 'Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice.'

Who were these 'other sheep?'

They were the Gentiles; those who as yet had no place in the flock of Christ, but were counted as outcasts and aliens from the fold. Hitherto salvation had been offered only to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel;' but henceforth the door of mercy was to be thrown open to all who would enter in, to the Gentile as well as the Jew.

It was of *them* that the Saviour here spoke. They were the *other sheep* whom He would bring; and they would hear His voice, and accept the offers of His love. And thus there would be one fold, and into it would be gathered men of all nations, who were willing to accept Him as their Lord.

If you look into the Epistle to the Ephesians, you will find St. Paul reminding his Gentile brethren, in ch. ii., that Christ had fulfilled this His promise, and had received them into His Church. 'Remember (he says) that ye being in time past Gentiles, that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were afar off, are made

nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both *one*, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, that he might reconcile *both* unto God *in one body* by the cross.'

But besides referring in these words particularly to the admission of the Gentiles, our Lord meant also to speak of *the general growth* of His Church. He now saw before Him a little company of believers—here and there a few who had left all to follow Him. But He knew well that their numbers would soon be multiplied an hundredfold. He pictured to Himself how in years to come whole nations would submit themselves to Him, and would come from the east and from the west, and be added to His Church.

In His boundless love He thought of these. Though they were as yet uncalled, and many of them unborn, they were dear to Him. He had them on His heart and in His eye. He foreknew and foresaw all their history.

Yes, when He said, 'Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice,'

He thought even of *us* who are now loving and serving Him. He thought of His Church and people to the end of time.

And He adds, 'There shall be one fold and one Shepherd.' Alas! that time has not yet come. Now there are many things which separate Christ's people one from another; many little divisions, many petty jealousies, between us. One Christian differs from another in his views of God's truth. Those who are bent on serving the same Saviour, and on reaching the same home, do not journey together by the same road. It is sad that it should be so, but so it is. The prayer of Jesus was, 'that they all might be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may know that thou hast sent me.' And He desires to see this oneness now in His earthly family. The want of it grieves Him to the heart.

But, thank God, the day is coming, when all will be harmony and love in His household. 'There shall be one fold and one Shepherd.' Whether this will ever be the case *on earth* I know not. Perhaps if

we had more of God's Spirit in our hearts, and more of His presence among us, we should be drawn more together. If we loved Christ more truly, and lived more closely to Him, we should be more united to one another. If Christ ever reigns on this earth (and many think He will), He will put an end to our dissensions, and rally us all together under His own blessed banner. Then will those words be fulfilled, 'The Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.'

At all events there will be this oneness in perfection in the kingdom above. There, indeed, there will be 'one fold and one Shepherd.' That fold will be a fold of safety, a fold of peace, a fold from which there will be no going out. All the scattered sheep of Christ's true flock will be there, all who have the Shepherd's mark upon them, all who have loved Him and served Him here, all who have heard His voice and followed Him. They will all be gathered together in the 'one fold:' and all will look up to the 'one Shepherd,' whose companionship they will enjoy for ever.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

ST. JOHN, XVI. 16–22.

Jesus said to his disciples, A little while and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while and ye shall see me: because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while and ye shall see me; and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now, therefore, have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

THIS was spoken by our Lord on the evening before His crucifixion. He had just been partaking of the last Passover

with His disciples. He had left the supper-room, and was on His way towards the garden of Gethsemane. Many of the disciples who were still with Him were full of sadness at the thought of His leaving them. And by way of comforting their hearts He says to them, 'A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me: because I go to the Father.'

As they did not clearly understand Him, they inquired of one another; 'What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while and ye shall see me; and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We cannot tell what he saith.'

They were at a loss to know what He meant. And our Lord was quite aware of their difficulty. 'Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament,

but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.' You observe, He does not exactly explain Himself: He merely tells them that events were coming that would cause joy to the world, but would for a time bring sorrow to them, though it would soon pass away, and they would again rejoice.

But what did His words actually mean? Let us see if we can understand them.

Our Lord here makes an announcement, that He was going to depart from them, and that He would again return. He evidently speaks of a *two-fold* departure, and of a *two-fold* return—of His departure in the course of a very few hours into the grave, and of His return again to the world for a little while; and then of His departure into heaven for a much longer time, and of His return one day in glory to reign for ever.

Let us take these events separately, and dwell on them for a few minutes.

First, His *immediate* departure, and His *immediate* return.

On the morrow Jesus was going to die, 'the just for the unjust.' In a few hours He was going to be stretched on the cross, and then laid in the grave. In a few hours He was to be taken from His beloved followers, and buried out of their sight. To this He no doubt referred when He said, 'A little while, and ye shall not see me.'

But very soon He would be among them again. He would tarry but a little while in the grave. Death would speedily give up its prisoner. He would rise again as a victorious Saviour. This was what He meant when He said, 'Again a little while, and ye *shall* see me.'

This, however, was not *all* that Jesus meant; for He adds, 'Because I go to the Father.' Clearly then He spoke also of *another departure* and *another return*, more distant. After remaining a few weeks upon earth, He was going back to His Father in heaven. He would then be removed out of their sight, but not for ever; for He would come again at the end of the world in power and great glory.

At this present moment we see Him not. Like the nobleman in the parable, He

is 'gone into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.' He is in heaven now, and we see Him not with our bodily eyes; but we *shall* see Him when He comes in His glory, and then we shall be with Him for ever.

Here then we have *all* that our Lord meant when He said, 'A little while and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.' He spoke of His *speedily* approaching Death and Resurrection, and He spoke also of His Ascension into heaven, and of His Second Advent, when He shall again appear among us. All this is included in the words before us.

But in our Lord's answer to His wondering disciples, He does not enter into any particulars concerning His absence or His return. All He dwells on is that His absence would cause much joy to the world and much grief to His people; but that theirs would not be a hopeless grief, for it would soon be exchanged for joy. He compares their feelings to those of a mother, who when her hour is come is in anguish for a while; but this is soon followed by a

joy of which only a mother can know the full blessedness; 'A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world.' And then, turning to His sorrow-stricken disciples with a look of tender compassion, He adds, 'And ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.'

There can be no doubt what was our Lord's great object. It was to cheer the hearts of His people, and to show them how different their feelings would be from those of the world.

His death, for instance, would be a triumph to the world. The Jews and the Romans hated Him, and conspired together against Him. Their cry was, 'We will not have this man to reign over us;' 'Crucify Him, crucify Him;' and a fiendish joy possessed them when they saw Him expire before their eyes. But how differently did His own followers feel! The tear of sorrow trickled down their cheeks as they beheld

Him breathing out His soul upon the cross. And those three days when He was in the grave were indeed days of unspeakable sorrow to them. The Bridegroom was taken from them, and they could but mourn. The Sun was hidden from them, and they were in darkness : it was night-time to their souls.

And again, what a difference between the world's feelings and the Christian's regarding the Saviour's resurrection. When He rose from the grave, and appeared once more to His disciples, many a one was filled with anger and disappointment. They hoped He would have remained a prisoner in the tomb; and therefore when He burst the chains of death, they were disquieted and alarmed. But how was it with His beloved disciples? We are told that they believed not for joy. The news was too good, thought they, to be true. And when He appeared among them, and showed them His hands and His side, then, we read, 'were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.'

And should our joy be less than theirs was? No; the Saviour's Resurrection is

everything to us. It is the crown of our rejoicing, the foundation of our hope. It is true, Jesus is not actually among us, as He was with them. We are not favoured with His bodily presence; but He is with us by His Spirit, and will be with us to the end.

Ay, and He will appear again *in person*. Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. He will then come with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him. To *them* His coming will be a signal for wailing and woe. They will shrink from beholding Him. They will 'cry out to the rocks and mountains, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.'

But His people will rejoice. I believe that the keenest joy that could fill the heart of a true believer would be to behold the Saviour returning in His glory. Those who have loved Him, and served Him in His absence, will then have their cup of joy filled to the very brim.

And now let us for a few moments ponder over these words of Jesus; 'A little

while and ye shall not see me, and again, a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.' He is absent from us now. But those words are very comforting which remind us that He is 'gone to the Father.' He is there, in His own proper home, interceding for us, and blessing us. Let us be comforted by this thought, and let us be ever looking forward with hope to that day, when His promise will be fulfilled; 'I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.'

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

St. John, xvi. 5–15.

Jesus said unto his disciples, Now I go my way to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But, because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.

We should bear in mind that the Gospel for to-day, as well as that for last Sunday, and the three next Sundays, are all taken

from our Lord's farewell address to His disciples on the evening before His crucifixion.

His thoughts were now fixed on His approaching death; but they were also turned to that happier time, when He would return to His Father in heaven. 'Now I go my way to Him that sent me;' as much as to say, 'My work on earth is nearly done, and I am going back to my Father's presence.'

He complains that none of them asked Him where He was going: they gave themselves up to grief, instead of inquiring *why* He was going to leave them. But He now tells them plainly that His departure was absolutely necessary; 'It is expedient for you that I go away.' It was not easy to persuade them that it would be better for them that He should leave them, and ascend to His Father. The very thought of a separation filled them with sadness. But in truth it was *expedient* that He should do so, as soon as He had laid down His life as a sacrifice for them; for we are told in the seventh chapter that until Jesus should be glorified, the Holy Spirit would

not be given. But He would then fulfil His promise, and send forth that Holy Spirit, to open their eyes, so that they might see more clearly than they had hitherto done the great work that He had accomplished.

They would soon be deprived of the presence of their Lord; but their loss would be their gain, for He would bestow on them gifts which they had not yet received. Therefore He said, 'It is *expedient* for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.'

It may be asked, Could not the Comforter have come down with power on the Church whilst Jesus was among them? Undoubtedly He could; but such was not the will and purpose of God. Therefore it was expedient that Jesus should leave them, in order that the promised gift might be bestowed.

Our Lord next proceeds to tell them what would be the chief effects that the Holy Spirit would produce. He specially mentions three. 'When he is come, he

will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.' And then He dwells upon each separately.

First, 'He will reprove (or convince) the world of *sin*,' says the Saviour, 'because they believe not on me.' Now, when the Spirit works in any one's heart, He brings home to him his sins. He makes him feel them. He shows them to him in their true light. But why does Jesus add, 'Because they believe not on me?' This is, doubtless, to show us that the greatest possible sin we can commit is rejecting Him. This is the worst of all sins, the master sin, the sin of sins, the parent of every sinful action. 'He that believeth not God (St. John says) hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.'

The Jews, in their blindness and hardness of heart, refused to believe in Christ. And great indeed was their guilt—so great that Jesus Himself says, 'He that believeth not is condemned already;' 'the wrath of God abideth on him.' But when the Spirit was given, on the day of Pentecost, num-

bers of unbelieving Jews were convinced, and believed on the Saviour. And so too in the present day; when the Holy Spirit gets an entrance into any heart, He convinces it of its sin, and especially of the sin of having so long lived without a Saviour.

Secondly, our Lord says that the Holy Spirit will convince the world 'of *righteousness*, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more.' The Jews accused Jesus of being an impostor, of having a devil, of being a destroyer of the law. And in a very few hours they were going to condemn Him as a malefactor. Many of them in doing so blindly imagined that they were doing God service. But the Holy Spirit would show them how wrong they were; that He was indeed a righteous person; that He was truly the Son of God, and was gone to His Father in heaven; and that they had committed a grievous sin, in having killed the Holy One and the Just.

Surely God would not raise an impostor from the dead, and would not receive him into His own presence; so that the very fact of His rising from the grave, and

ascending into heaven, proved that God regarded Him as a righteous Being. And this was a truth that the Holy Ghost would bring home to many hearts: He would 'reprove the world of *righteousness.*'

Thirdly, says Jesus, He will reprove (or convince) the world 'of *judgment*, because the prince of this world is judged;' that is, He will show men that God is just, and that He will execute righteous judgment.

When Jesus died, and rose again, Satan was conquered and condemned. The seed of the woman bruised the serpent's head. 'The prince of this world' was subdued. This can only be brought home to men by the Spirit's teaching; and then they will glorify Christ for what He has done, and for the mighty triumph which He has gained over the world's great enemy.

Such will be the important work which the Holy Ghost will effect on the hearts of men; convincing them of sin (of their own sin)—of *righteousness* (that Christ is the righteous one)—of *judgment* (that God

is just, and that He has condemned Satan).

Before we go on to the next verses, let each one of us ask ourselves, Has the Holy Spirit carried on His work in *my* heart? Has He convinced me of my sin, making me loathe and abhor it? Has He shown me that Christ is the only righteous one; that I am guilty, and that I must hide myself in Him, if I would be righteous too? Has He clearly taught me that God is just, and that He has already baffled Satan, 'the Prince of this world,' by exalting Christ to be a true Prince and a Saviour? Has He led me to exclaim with triumph, 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again?'

And now we pass on to the concluding verses of the Gospel,

'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.' We may be sure that the Saviour's heart just then was very full. There was much that He longed to tell His disciples for their guidance and comfort. But their eyes

were only as yet half opened. They were like little children, who could only bear the very simplest food. But Jesus adds; 'Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth;' that is, 'Your eyes will then be fully opened, and your minds will be fitted to receive all the great and glorious truths of the gospel.'

He cautions them, however, not to expect any new revelation from the Holy Spirit; nothing different from what they had already heard; only that He would enable them to understand those truths more fully and more clearly; 'He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.'

And what the Holy Ghost did for them, He does also for us. He makes no new revelation to us; but He gives us grace to lay hold of those truths, which before only floated in our heads. He takes of the

things of Christ, and shows them to us, especially the great doctrines of the cross. He reveals them to our hearts, so that we believe them, and cling to them as our hope.

Having now explained the whole passage, let us just for a few moments dwell on a point or two in it.

Our Lord says that 'it is expedient for Him to go away.' Ah, how little do we know what is best for us! The disciples felt (and naturally felt) that their Lord's departure would be a bitter loss to them; that it would have been better for them if He could have stayed among them. But no; He must leave them. And although they would lose the advantage of His presence below, they would gain much by His presence above.

And thus it often happens, that God takes away one blessing that He may bestow another. If then any circumstance should arise that crosses our own will, let us remember that God is perhaps saying, 'Be content: it is expedient for you;' and let this satisfy us.

Again, our Lord observed to His disciples that 'He had many things to say unto them, but they could not bear them now.' And so it is with ourselves. He has many gifts to bestow, but perhaps we are not fitted for them now. He has many things to teach us, but as yet we cannot bear the full light. Soon we shall be able to receive *all His gifts*. Soon we shall be able to drink in *all His truths*. Now we know in part; but then, when we reach heaven, we shall know even as we are known.

Meanwhile, Jesus tells us that there is a Teacher who is able to 'guide us unto all truth;' that is, He will teach us everything that is good for us to know. The wisest among us, the most advanced Christian, will not obtain *complete* knowledge on this side the grave. He will, after all, find many things hidden from him. But those truths which are needful for him to know are all within his reach. The humblest learner in the School of Christ may be quite sure that nothing will be withheld from him which he ought to know. He has a key which will unlock every treasure of

God's word; for 'if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.'

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

St. John, xvi. 23 to end.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name; and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto

you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

In the gospel for to-day we still linger over the parting words which our Lord uttered just before His life was taken from Him.

He speaks to His disciples about Prayer.* That was a subject He had often touched upon. But He now tells them more plainly how they might be always sure to obtain a hearing from God—'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name*, He will give it you.'

This was a large promise, but not too large; for is there anything that God will deny His children, if they come to Him rightly? Observe, He says '*Whatsoever*;' there is no stint, no limit, nothing wanting on God's part, if not on ours. Truly this must have been a most comforting promise

* The first part of the twenty-third verse is not included in the Gospel. Our Lord had said, 'In that day ye shall ask me nothing.' By this He meant, that they were no longer to apply to *Him* as they had done when He was upon earth; but they were henceforth to lift up their eyes to heaven, feeling that they had a Father there, and that He (the Saviour) would act as their Advocate.

to the poor sorrowing disciples. It must indeed have cheered their drooping hearts, and made them lift up their heads with hope.

As yet they scarcely knew that Christ was the great Mediator, and that, when in heaven, He would act as their Advocate with the Father. 'Hitherto (He says) ye have asked nothing *in my name.*' But now He tells them plainly, that whenever they shall apply to the Father *in His name*, they would be accepted. He therefore adds, 'Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.' Here then was a most blessed assurance that their prayers, if thus offered, would never be in vain.

It is true, as I said just now, Jesus had often conversed with them about the duty and blessedness of prayer; but He had never spoken to them so plainly as He does now. 'These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs; (that is, I have only *hinted* at these things: I have spoken in a way that may have been a little difficult for you to understand;) but the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I will show you

plainly of the Father. At that day (when I shall have ascended up into heaven) ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and go to the Father.'

Now, what did our Lord mean when He said, 'I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you?' Does He not tell us elsewhere that He does pray for us? The seventeenth chapter is full of Christ's prayer for His people; and in Rom. viii. and Heb. vii. we are told distinctly that He does intercede for us. What then does He mean, when He declares in the passage before us, 'I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you?' I think He means to assure His disciples, that they themselves are welcome at the throne of grace; that God is their Father and their Friend, and has a willing ear to hearken to His children. There would be no need for Him to be ever using fresh entreaties to

persuade His Father to be reconciled to them, and to accept them. On the contrary, He assures them that God already loves them, and His arms are open to receive them. The very fact too of His being with His Father would be enough to encourage them, and to ensure them a favourable hearing.

This explanation seems to have thoroughly satisfied His disciples; for they replied, 'Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee. By this we believe that thou camest forth from God.'

But Jesus is not so satisfied with their reply. He takes up one of their expressions, 'Now we believe,' and puts home to them the inquiry, 'Do ye now believe? Is your faith in me such, that it will not easily be shaken? Do you believe on me, and trust me, so completely, that you will be able to stand your ground when the hour of trial comes?'

Jesus knew that a searching time was at hand, and that in a few hours the weak-

ness of their faith would be proved. They fancied that they had an unflinching trust; but He tells them that an event was coming that would search them to the very quick. They now believed, as they said, that Jesus 'came forth from God.' But they would find their faith a little shaken when they should see Him seized, condemned, and crucified as a malefactor. 'Behold, the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.'

And was it not so? On that very night Judas betrayed Him; and Peter, who had made the boldest profession of them all, turned away from Him, and denied Him. All except St. John kept at a distance, and were afraid to own themselves His followers. The shepherd was smitten, and the sheep were scattered.

Now, to have known that such would be the case, must have filled the Saviour's heart and theirs with sadness. But He felt it right to warn them. Indeed such was always His way of dealing with them. He always told them what their trials

would be. He concealed nothing from them. He painted everything in its true colours. And why did He act thus? He tells us in the last verse, 'These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

Let us pause for a minute or two over these words, before we close, for they are very important.

Our Lord tells His disciples that they would find *peace in Him*, but *tribulation in the world.*

Their life in the world would be one of unceasing trouble and anxiety. And so they found it. When any of them followed Christ, the world would be their enemy. Unbelieving men would persecute and slander them, as they had persecuted their Master before them. When any of them preached the gospel, the world would revile them. When they tried to win souls, the world would throw impediments in their way. They would be hated of all men for His name's sake.

If you trace the labours of the Apostles of old, or if you mark the course of any faithful disciple now, you see the truth of our Lord's words, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation.'

Yes, and it is well to know this. For if we expect an easy path in life, we shall only be disappointed. The true follower of Christ will be sure to meet with opposition. We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom. And well is it, if we do enter it after all. Well is it, if we bear in mind that we are in an enemy's country, and are content to fight our way through it, trusting in God.

But there is another side to the picture. It is not all dark. There is a bright side also. Our Lord is not content merely to tell us that 'in the world we shall have tribulation,' but He adds, 'I have overcome the world.' The world cannot conquer you; for I have won the battle for you. I have passed through the world. I have trodden its roughest paths. I have withstood its enticements, and surmounted its difficulties. And in my strength you may surmount them also.

Yes, the Christian is sure to win the day at last. Trials, difficulties, dangers, may be his portion here. But he shall come out of them all a conqueror. He may say with the Apostle, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.'

But this is not all. There is not only *future* victory, but there is *present* joy for the true Believer. In Christ there is peace; peace in the humble consciousness of being pardoned and accepted; peace in the feeling that Jesus loves us, and that we are safe in Him; peace in those happy paths which He bids us walk in; peace in the persuasion that He is ever with us; and peace in the still brighter assurance that our home will be with Him for ever.

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